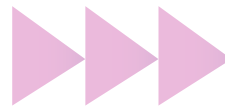
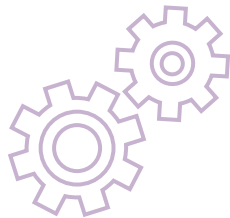




Higher Education Apprenticeships Toolkit

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Supporting the
Apprentice's Journey:
Assessment

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About this toolkit

The Higher Education Apprenticeships Toolkit is split into the following parts and sub-sections, published on the [QAA Membership Resources site](#):

Developing Apprenticeships



Supporting the Apprentice's Journey

- Recruitment and Admissions
- Learning and Teaching
- Assessment
- The Apprentice Experience
- Complaints and Appeals



Quality Assuring and Enhancing Higher Education Apprenticeships



Assessment

As with other qualifications, assessment plays an important role in the award of higher education apprenticeships, and in this section of the toolkit we will consider:

- reference points for assessment in higher education apprenticeship provision
- key sector reference points
- assessment in the UK nations.



Reference points for assessment in higher education apprenticeship provision

Assessment in higher education apprenticeships should be authentic and informed by real work activity. There should be evidence of the impact of learning for the apprentice and the workplace. The relevant apprenticeship framework/standard should provide the fundamental information on which to base assessment. This includes, in England, the requirement for specific end-point assessment of the knowledge, skills and behaviours in the associated Standard for the apprenticeship.

Training providers should ensure that assessment is designed to meet the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship framework/standard, and where a higher education qualification is also included, the learning outcomes for that qualification, at the appropriate academic level. Providers should also consider how apprenticeship provision will operate within the wider assessment regulations to ensure that any requirements are met and that there are clear and appropriate assessment processes in place. These regulations should cover aspects relating to areas such as the personal learning plan and arrangements for the moderation/verification of assessment.

Key sector reference points

Key sector reference points such as the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) and the [European Standards and Guidelines \(ESG\)](#) identify a range of factors that are important for assessment to be effective. Key points include that assessment:

- is well-designed and reliable
- information, including the associated assignment and marking criteria, is made available to key stakeholders in advance to ensure transparency
- enables students/learners (apprentices) to demonstrate the achievement of the required knowledge, skills and behaviours/learning outcomes
- is carried out by individuals with appropriate expertise and experience
- is monitored to ensure that arrangements are applied consistently and fairly, and in accordance with stated procedures
- regulations take into account mitigating circumstances
- procedures include appropriate arrangements for student appeals.

In higher education provision, providers should ensure that:

- academic standards are rigorously set and maintained
- student performance is equitably judged against these standards.

Training providers delivering higher education apprenticeships have the same responsibilities for the assessment of learning required for the achievement of the apprenticeship. However, there are elements to the assessment of higher education apprenticeships that differ because of the context and employment-led nature of the qualification. There are also differences across the UK nations, with England having a distinct focus on the end-point assessment (EPA) of knowledge, skills and behaviours by an End-point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) who assesses the synoptic EPA independently from the delivery team.

Where degree-awarding bodies work with others to deliver awards, delivery partners without degree awarding powers are expected to operate assessment processes within the academic framework and regulations of the degree-awarding body, in accordance with their delegated role. Similarly, providers delivering awards of awarding organisations, should operate in accordance with the required processes.

Assessment in the UK nations

England

Higher education apprenticeships in England usually require an independently assessed, synoptic end-point assessment (EPA) of the associated knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) in accordance with the relevant Standard's EPA plan, available from the [apprenticeship search](#) on the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's (IfATE's) website.

The EPA is designed to test that apprentices:

- can demonstrate the duties and KSBs specified in the relevant Standard
- are fully occupationally competent.

The EPA must:

- be conducted at the final stage of the apprenticeship, after the apprentice has passed the gateway requirements set out in the relevant EPA plan
- include at least two assessment methods.

Methods of assessment may include requirements such as:

- a work or practice-based project and/or
- a performative assessment, such as a presentation or professional discussion.

It is important that providers ensure apprentices have had adequate access and practice for these forms of assessment throughout their programme and prior to the gateway. Where a Standard includes professional, statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) recognition, the EPA may stand as the requirement for establishing professional status and/or membership.

At the time of writing, there are some apprenticeships in England, such as the Registered Nurse degree apprenticeship, where there is no actual EPA assessment. The alternative approach taken in these cases usually involves an Award Board confirming if all the requirements of the PSRB programme have been met and this then enables the apprentice to proceed to the gateway.

There have been two types of degree apprenticeships in England: non-integrated and integrated. [IfATE](#) introduced a new policy for degree apprenticeships from September 2022 and this included the move towards degree apprenticeships being integrated (which applies to new apprenticeships being developed and to existing apprenticeships as they are due for review).

The move towards integrated degree apprenticeships is intended to help mitigate against the situation where apprentices may successfully complete the degree element of the apprenticeship, but not gain the overall apprenticeship as a result of not completing the EPA. In an integrated degree apprenticeship, the EPA is integral to the achievement of both the degree and the apprenticeship, as summarised in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Summary of the components of non-integrated and integrated degree apprenticeships

Non-integrated degree apprenticeship		Integrated degree apprenticeship
Degree	EPA	Degree+EPA
Assessment of modules for the degree	End-point assessment (EPA) of knowledge, skills and behaviours for the apprenticeship, conducted by an end-point assessment organisation (EPAO)	End-point assessment contributes to the degree Assessment of modules for the degree and, at the end of the programme, completion of the EPA EPA conducted by an end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) which is usually the degree-awarding body
Degree awarded (if modules successfully completed)	Apprenticeship awarded (if the apprentice successfully completes the EPA and has also completed any mandatory qualifications including Level 2 English and maths)	Degree and apprenticeship awarded (if the apprentice successfully completes the required modules, including the EPA and any mandatory qualifications such as Level 2 English and maths)

Training providers delivering integrated degree apprenticeships will need to ensure that they:

- meet the requirements of the relevant apprenticeship assessment plan in demonstrating the independence of the process for the EPA
- are registered on the [Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register \(APAR\)](#) for the relevant apprenticeship standard.¹

¹ The APAR went live 1 August 2023 and is a merger of the end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) register and the register of apprenticeship training providers ([RoATP](#)), with organisations being added when they receive recognition for an apprenticeship standard from Ofqual or the Office for Students, or new EPAOs being required to confirm their place on the register by creating an account on the apprenticeship service. [ESFA Update further education: 24 May 2023](#).

Conducting end-point assessment (EPA)

The EPA needs to be conducted by an organisation on the Apprenticeship Providers and Assessment Register (APAR). For non-integrated degree apprenticeships, the provider or employer can select an organisation, while for integrated degree apprenticeships this is usually the degree-awarding body.

The end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) should:

- have robust internal quality assurance arrangements
- ensure there will be no conflict of interest on the part of individual assessors and itself
- stipulate how it will manage any conflicts of interest when submitting an application to the APAR
- comply with the relevant internal quality assurance arrangements in the associated EPA plan.

EPA should be assessed:

- in line with the EPA plan - which may specify that where successful completion of an apprenticeship also confers PSRB recognition, assessors have a specified professional status, such as being a Chartered Member or Fellow
- by assessors who have relevant practice-based experience and/or expertise
- independently of the delivery of the apprenticeship with the final decision on whether an apprentice is occupationally competent resting with the independent assessor(s).

[IfATE's policy for degree apprenticeships \(September 2022\)](#) includes information relating to:

- the implementation schedule of the new policy
- determining whether a degree can be mandated in an apprenticeship
- effective integration of on and off-the-job training
- aligning degree learning outcomes with the associated Standard's knowledge, skills and behaviours
- end-point assessments in degree apprenticeships.

The arrangements for England therefore differ to those in the other UK nations where there are no separate EPA requirements, and the assessment is fully integrated.



Northern Ireland

The Higher Level Apprenticeship programme in Northern Ireland has no separate EPA, with the achievement of the overall framework based on assessment of the qualification success, and assessment of the on-the-job learning through a work-based project and e-portfolio.

Scotland

In Scotland, all Graduate Apprenticeships are, by definition, integrated. Therefore, there are no EPA requirements. Graduate apprenticeships are principally designed to be delivered and assessed in the workplace and take account of a range of assessment methods to accommodate workplace learning.

Similarly, Modern Apprenticeships do not include a specific end-point assessment. Modern apprenticeships typically include a competency based qualification (usually a Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ)), core skills (or for more recent frameworks, [meta skills](#)) and knowledge enhancement which may involve off-the-job training.

The training provider and employer work together to support apprentice assessment and ensure that:

- assessment activity is aligned to both the provider's academic standards and the workplace activity in order to reflect the needs of employers and the apprentice.

An example of this could be:

- delivery of generic and non-employer specific (for example, knowledge and understanding) content by the training provider and specific content from the employer
- assessments where the task specification has been designed by the training provider, the employer and apprentice, with progress monitoring and assessment by the training provider, with the support of the employer, in providing the opportunity for the assessment to take place; the employer would also provide mentoring to the apprentice to support progress and attainment
- development of personal and professional skills specifications that have been designed by the employer and the training provider, with delivery by the employer (and/or a third party) and training provider; progress monitoring and assessment would be by the training provider; as with assessments, the employer would provide ongoing mentoring support and may be asked to verify that the competencies claimed by an apprentice, for example, are reasonable.

Where recognition of prior learning (RPL) has been credited, the training provider ensures that this RPL does not conflict with its minimum terms of assessment to maintain standards for its awards.

Wales

The Degree Apprenticeship framework in Wales has no separate EPA. Achievement of the higher education apprenticeship is therefore based on assessment of the qualification and the achievement of the relevant module learning outcomes.

The employer and training provider should ensure that apprentices have the opportunities, in the workplace, to meet the competency requirements of the apprenticeship framework. Training providers should be clear and transparent with the employer and apprentice about the commitments they are signing up to including the commitment to release the apprentice for any off-the-job training. To ensure that assessment is authentic, live project briefs are negotiated with the provider, employer and apprentice.

Where relevant, training providers are expected to recognise prior learning, particularly where individuals have undertaken apprenticeships at lower levels. Training providers have the opportunity to deliver Level 6 top-ups that would be shorter in duration than full degree apprenticeships. Degree apprenticeships in Wales can include early exit awards within the validated qualification.

QAA Review of Degree Apprenticeships in Wales

Assessment

It was found that:

- as called for in HEFCW's requirements for funding Degree Apprenticeships, apprentices' previous experience and learning was recognised where appropriate
- degree apprenticeship programmes used a range of assessment methods including: formal written examinations; coursework; case studies and projects; with designated work-based learning activities included in them
- comprehensive assessment information was available to apprentices in module assessment briefs or module descriptors, outlining the learning objectives being assessed, assessment criteria and submission requirements
- providers were working with the employer to ensure apprentices had suitable work-based projects which met the learning outcomes
- where it had been difficult to allocate tasks to apprentices, as their job roles did not require them to undertake some requirements of the programme, apprentice scenarios were provided, as well as opportunities within other workplaces, to cover the required outcomes.

In one instance, other organisations had approached the provider with projects to be undertaken by apprentices and students.

Examples of good practice:

- Employer involvement in formative assessment

Examples of areas for development:

- Consistently ensuring that assessments are contextualised for the workplace
- The need to keep employers informed (for example, which could involve sharing external examiners' reports with employers)

Ensuring the effectiveness of assessment

It is usual for training providers to have internal mechanisms to ensure the effectiveness of assessment arrangements. In addition, providers often make use of external expertise, through individuals who are not directly involved with the delivery and assessment of a programme and can therefore provide an independent perspective on a range of elements, including assessment. The inclusion of expertise is likely to be influenced by specific programme/nation requirements, including those outlined in any key regulation and/or reference points, but sources of external expertise include:

- external examiners
- external advisers, which could include:
 - professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)
 - employers and other external stakeholders
 - guest speakers and visiting academics.

In addition to the examples of external expertise listed above, students/learners/apprentices and alumni can also provide valuable input on assessment arrangements.

External examining arrangements provide an external perspective for higher education apprenticeships, as with other higher education provision.

In England, EPA plans for integrated degree apprenticeships usually include reference to external examiners, as the EPA is conducted as an integrated aspect of the qualification and will usually be under the auspices of the training provider's independent external examiner system. However, in a non-integrated degree apprenticeship, where EPA is conducted by a separate, independent EPAO, training provider-appointed external examiners for any higher education award will not play a direct role in the EPA process. External examiners may also have a specific remit linked to external quality assurance requirements for apprenticeships - for example, in the external quality assurance of end-point assessment in England at the time of publication ([OfS: external quality assurance of end-point assessment for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships](#)). The quality assurance of higher education apprenticeships is mainly covered within the [Quality Assuring and Enhancing Higher Education Apprenticeships](#) section of this toolkit.

Training providers should ensure that they brief any external examiners on the specific nature of their role for higher education apprenticeships. In England, this will need to include:

- specifying whether the apprenticeship involves integrated or separate EPA
- the relationship between apprenticeship duties and KSBs and programme/module learning outcomes
- the way that EPA is conducted and any implications for their role (including any external quality assurance requirements)
- how the learning opportunities provided by the higher education programme are delivered in the context of on-the-job and off-the-job learning.

In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, external examiners provide external and objective feedback on the fairness and appropriateness of a higher education provider's student assessment processes, and therefore form an integral part of the provider's review and evaluation procedures to assure the security of the academic standards of its programmes and awards. The activity culminates in an annual report from each examiner to inform internal quality assurance arrangements and enhancement.

Further information relating to the overarching role of external examiners, following a review of practice, can be found in the [External Examining Principles](#).



Reflective questions

Assessment - design/delivery

- What are the assessment requirements for the apprenticeship?
- What mechanisms are you putting in place to ensure that your assessments are work-based and reflect workplace practices?
- How will apprentices demonstrate they meet the required knowledge, skills and behaviours/ learning outcomes of the related apprenticeship framework/standard?
- What are the key regulatory requirements/reference points to be considered when designing/ delivering assessment(s) (including any mandatory elements set out in the EPA plan in England, and the Welsh language standards in Wales)?
- How are you embedding equality, diversity and inclusion within the assessment(s), including consideration of any reasonable adjustments?
- How do you ensure that assessment is reliable, consistent, fair and valid?
- How do you ensure that assessment arrangements encourage academic integrity?
- What timescales apply to the assessment(s)?
- What consideration are you giving to the use of generative artificial intelligence?
- What policies/procedures do you have for any cases of academic misconduct?
- How have you embedded the apprenticeship assessment requirements in your academic assessment regulations?

Support for apprentices

- When (and how) are apprentices introduced to the assessment requirements for the apprenticeship?
- What assessment information is available for apprentices (including the related timescales and arrangements for submission)?
- What support options are available for apprentices to ensure they are prepared effectively for the assessment?
- What opportunities are apprentices given to prepare for the elements of end-point assessment?
- How are apprentices supported in relation to academic integrity and any appropriate use of generative artificial intelligence?

Support for employers

- How are employers involved in/informed of the assessment of apprentices?
- What training/continued professional development and support is available for employers involved in any assessment of apprentices?

Support for training provider staff

- Do you have sufficient staff resource to meet the requirements for assessment (including any specific requirements for independent assessors, as outlined in the EPA plan, for apprenticeships overseen by IfATE, in England) or to assess via the medium of Welsh in Wales?
- What qualifications and/or continued professional development opportunities are expected/available for staff involved in assessing higher education apprenticeship programmes?
- What arrangements are in place to ensure the suitability of staff undertaking roles such as assessing end-point assessment - for example, in ensuring their independence?
- What support is provided to staff members to ensure they fulfil their assessment roles effectively?
- What standardisation/moderation/sampling arrangements are in place to ensure that the marking of assessment(s) is appropriate and consistent?
- What communication arrangements are in place to ensure that any staff involved in the assessment of apprentices remain up-to-date with and/or can contribute to the arrangements for assessment?

Arrangements for quality assurance/enhancement

- What are the internal arrangements for monitoring assessment (including at any partner organisations)?
- What are the regulatory and external quality assurance requirements for assessment on the higher education apprenticeships you deliver (including those relating to specific staff roles)?
- How do your arrangements for monitoring assessment contribute to the enhancement of the higher education apprenticeship provision?

Further resources

Reference points

[GOV.UK - Provider guide to delivering high quality apprenticeships \(England\)](#)

[QAA - UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)

[QAA - Quality Code - Advice and Guidance](#)

[ENQA - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance \(ESG, 2015\)](#)

[QAA - External Examining Principles](#)

[QAA - Higher Education in Apprenticeships Characteristics Statement](#)

[QAA - Making Use of Credit: A Companion to the Higher Education Credit Framework for England](#)

[ENQA - Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance \(ESG, 2015\)](#)

[QAA - Qualifications can Cross Boundaries: A guide to comparing qualifications in the UK and Ireland](#)

Guidance

[ASET - Good Practice guides](#)

[Jisc - Apprenticeship toolkit](#)

[QAA - Academic integrity](#)

[QAA - External Examining Principles](#)

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Tel: 01452 557000

Web: www.qaa.ac.uk