

GUIDANCE

Withdrawn - End-Point Assessment Organisation recognition briefing

Guidance for organisations considering applying for
Ofqual recognition to deliver apprenticeship End-
Point Assessments

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About Ofqual recognition

Ofqual provides External Quality Assurance (EQA) of apprenticeship End-Point Assessments (EPAs) through the regulation of End-Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs). The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (The Institute) oversees EQA delivery to ensure that EQA is robust and carried out consistently across EQA providers.

There are many benefits to being recognised by Ofqual. Ofqual recognition provides confidence to employers, apprentices and training providers that your organisation has the capacity and competence to develop and offer high-quality EPAs, and where applicable other qualifications too.

If you want to offer an EPA where we provide EQA, you will need to be recognised by us for each apprenticeship standard you want to offer. Details of all approved standards are available on the [Institute's website](#) and those for which we provide EQA are listed on [our website](#).

The purpose of this guidance is to help you prepare fully for applying for Ofqual recognition.

Ofqual recognition ensures that EPAs are only delivered by high-quality organisations who have the capability to design, develop and deliver EPAs. It's a consistent and objective process for all applicants, which ensures fairness and provides assurance. Each organisation is considered for recognition in the context of the number and type of EPAs they want to offer. We acknowledge that each EPAO is different, and that not all applicants will have experience of working with a regulator. We offer support throughout the recognition process to help you understand what it means to be regulated and how to demonstrate that you meet our requirements.

The application process

If you haven't already, you will need to familiarise yourself with the following documents. We assess applications against our [Criteria for Recognition](#). You will need to demonstrate that you can meet these criteria in order to become recognised. You will also need to demonstrate that you comply with the [General Conditions of Recognition](#) and the [EPA qualification level conditions](#) on an ongoing basis.

We have published [guidance for the criteria](#) and [EPA qualification level guidance](#) to support with your application.

Additional guidance

We have published a range of guidance to support your application for recognition.

- [Video: understanding recognition](#) – a helpful overview relevant to all awarding organisations
- [Video: 7 top tips for recognition](#) – focusing on criteria D
- [Guidance on Conflicts of Interest](#) – published information which helps applicants think about this cross-cutting theme
- [Overview of the recognition process](#)

How to apply

Once you're ready to apply, you can register for [a gateway account](#). A step by step guide on how to use the gateway is available in this [guidance document](#).

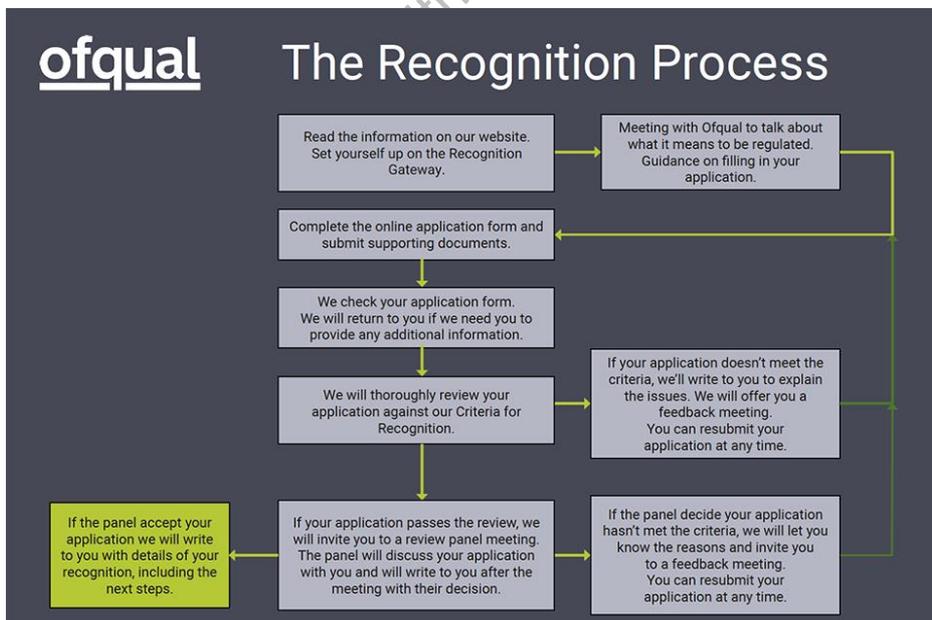
Through the gateway you will be able to:

- manage key information that we hold about you and your organisation
- arrange a meeting with us to find out more about the recognition process and our expectations, where we can answer any questions you may have
- complete and submit an application for recognition
- track the progress of your application
- be informed of the outcome of your application

How your application is reviewed

Our recognition team will carry out an initial check of your application. If we identify that documents you have referenced are missing, or it is not clear from your application which standards you are seeking recognition for, we will contact you and identify the additional information or explanation that we need. We will return your application to you, so that you can provide the information or explanations identified.

Once we have all of the relevant information, we will review your application in full. The review will identify whether you meet the [Criteria for Recognition](#). In doing so we undertake due diligence checks, and we may seek input from subject experts and ask for further clarification from you in the form of a recognition panel meeting.



We will form a view on whether your understanding of and commitment to the development, delivery and assessment of EPAs is sufficient, and ensure you will operate in accordance with the [General Conditions of Recognition](#) and the [EPA qualification level conditions](#).

We consider each application on its own merits including the information you provide and any that we gather through our due diligence checks. If there are clear points where your application does not meet the Criteria for Recognition, we will return it to you with an explanation of what the issues are and offer you the opportunity to attend a feedback meeting. This will allow you to clarify any points that we make in the letter and ensure that you understand what is needed to address these. You will then receive a notification that we have rejected the application on the Gateway and you can resubmit your updated application to us at any time. If you are required to resubmit your application, please resubmit all evidence; not just what has been identified as missing, so that we can undertake a complete review of all evidence.

If the review process indicates that the criteria have been or could be met, the final stage of the process is a meeting with an Ofqual recognition panel where you will have the opportunity to discuss your application with us and for us to clarify parts of your application. The meeting will be chaired by a senior member of Ofqual's staff and attended by members of our team with relevant and specialist expertise. The outcome of this meeting could be to accept your application, accept your application with special conditions, or reject your application with reasons.

Additional information: the application process

Making your application

All applications must now be made through our recognition gateway. If you don't already have one, you will need to [register for an account](#).

Uploading documents to the portal

To upload the supporting documents that you have referred to throughout your application, under the 'upload documents' header click 'choose files'. You will be presented with a pop-up window where you can select your chosen documents. The title of each file will be displayed after uploading it. Please reference your documents clearly and ensure that the number entered corresponds with the number uploaded. You may find it easier to upload in batches rather than all documents in one go.

Please note: We expect you to upload all documents as well referenced individual files. Please do not upload Zip files as they are not always secure.

How to contact us if you have a question

If you need clarification on the application form or any part of the process, you can contact us through the portal, or by emailing strategicrelationships@ofqual.gov.uk. For technical IT queries email portalsupport@ofqual.gov.uk.

Additional information: meeting our criteria

Governing body

If you are a limited company, this refers to your board of directors. If you are not a limited company, the governing body can be a person or group of people having the equivalent status within your organisational structure. Essentially this term refers to whoever has continuing oversight of, and is directly accountable for, your organisation.

Matching the criteria to the General Conditions of Recognition

To be successful at gaining recognition, you need to demonstrate how you meet the [Criteria for Recognition](#) and the supporting guidance is based on this. The General Conditions of Recognition are the rules that regulated awarding organisations must comply with once they are recognised. While the numbering in the criteria and the Conditions may look similar, the requirements are different. The numbering system relating to the criteria (ie A1 / B2) should not be confused with the numbering system in the Conditions.

Theoretical applications

You need to explain how you would meet the requirement for the qualifications / EPA you are seeking recognition for. Not everything needs to be in place and ready to go; we will assess your capability to deliver when you say you are going to. For example, if you need to recruit additional assessors, then we need to understand how you will recruit the right people with the right expertise. If you are already offering qualifications or EPA then you could use information relating to this that may demonstrate how your processes work.

Demonstrating consideration of conflicts of interest

There are a number of scenarios that could cause a conflict of interest, for example:

- training providers who are also awarding organisations / EPAOs
- individuals making decisions on finances who are responsible for qualification and apprenticeship standards

We understand that conflicts of interest may occur, but we need to see how you will mitigate and manage these conflicts. That means we'll expect to see policies, procedures and other documentation that you consider demonstrates that you understand conflicts of interest, and explains how you will prevent and manage these on an ongoing basis. Our [supporting information on conflicts of interest](#) provides further guidance on this topic.

Why we ask for financial information

We ask for this information so that we can check that your organisation is financially sound. To protect the interests of apprentices, we need to make sure that your

business is resilient and is likely to be operating for a number of years. Employers need to be confident that they can rely on you and your business operations to deliver, assess and potentially appeal against the outcome of an EPA. We will take a backwards and forward look at your accounts. This helps us understand how your investments will support you long-term and how you will protect learners. We ask for a three-year financial forecast/business plan, including expected take-up of the EPA, plus a sensitivity analysis based on profit and loss performance and the impact on cash (best and worst case scenarios). We are working with ESFA to explore areas of cross-over with a view to simplifying the process of requesting financial information.

We understand that the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may have impacted your financial performance, and may potentially impact your forecasts for the future. Any forecasts and projections that you provide should reflect your best assumption about the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on your business. This could include a brief commentary on your financial accounts and projections where they suggest your performance will be different to the past or there is more uncertainty in your projections due to the pandemic. We want to understand your confidence in your projections and how you will manage the financial risks and uncertainties that may have arisen as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

Offering other (non-EPA) qualifications once you become recognised

If you are considering developing other regulated qualifications, please let us know in your application form. You can apply for recognition of these qualifications at the time of applying or expand your scope of recognition at a later date. The evidence in your application should reflect the range of qualifications you want to offer.

What we mean by centres

Centres are organisations that deliver part of a qualification on behalf of an awarding organisation. In an EPA context this could be an employer or a training provider that delivers or marks an assessment. For example, a centre may deliver an assessment where no person employed or contracted by the AO/EPAO is present while the assessment is being taken. In such a case (where the assessment plan permits) the centre would have responsibility for administering the assessment. Section C of the [General Conditions of Recognition](#) covers arrangements with centres and we have published specific guidance on this in our [EPA qualification level guidance](#) (page 6).

Evidencing how you work with centres

We would expect to see evidence that explains how you will manage your relationship with centres (including employers or training providers); for example how you would expect centres to invigilate assessments, and how you would take action should any issues, such as malpractice or maladministration, occur. This evidence should include an example of the enforceable agreement you would have with those centres which allows you to investigate issues such as malpractice allegations. In some cases, no part of an EPA will be delivered by a centre as the EPAO will deliver the assessments itself. This includes where an assessment takes place on an employer's premises, but the employer takes no part in the delivery of the

assessment. In such circumstances you should explain that this is the case and how the EPAO will undertake the assessment at the centre, including what arrangements it will have in place to maintain the security and validity of the assessment.

What we mean by qualification design

In the context of EPAs, qualification design refers to the design of the assessment as required by the assessment plan. This is not a repeat of what is in the assessment plan – it is how you design, develop, deliver and award what is specified in the assessment plan.

For example, an assessment plan includes what Knowledge, Skills & Behaviours must be covered in a specific assessment method – such as an interview – but it may not stipulate the detail of the interview, length, or the types of interviews questions to use. Therefore, an EPAO would have to design the specification, which may include using experts to design the interview questions so that they are robust, rigorous and fit for purpose. We would want to see what processes you have in place for making this happen; such as recruitment of experts, managing conflicts of interest, and testing the validity of interview questions.

Providing evidence of assessment requirements

Trailblazer groups design the assessment plans. They have determined what they would like EPAOs to test through an agreed set of assessment methods, and we need to be confident that EPAOs have the capacity and capability to respond to this plan and deliver what employers want. We want to know how you will develop the assessment required by the assessment plan, and what expertise and capability you have to be able to deliver EPAs that are valid and reliable. The evidence we require will be proportionate to the size of your organisation and the EPA you intend to deliver. If you want to deliver more than one EPA, we will expect to see in your application a document, or documents, that explain how you will develop, deliver and award each of the different assessment methods required in the different assessment plans.

You should also ensure your submission explains how you will ensure the EPAs you offer meet the relevant Equalities Law¹ at every stage of the qualification lifecycle; and, how you will review the process to ensure it remains valid and reliable.

Providing evidence for Criteria D: Competence

We do not prescribe or recommend a particular approach to providing the evidence against Criteria D. We need you to provide us with evidence that shows you are able to develop and deliver assessments. We are looking for evidence showing **how** you will develop, deliver and award regulated end-point assessments against the relevant assessment plan/s. This evidence will help us determine your understanding

¹ Criteria for Recognition – defined terms - The Equality Act 2010, any Act that was a statutory predecessor to that Act, or any legislation in a jurisdiction other than England which has an equivalent purpose and effect.

of **why** those processes are appropriate for the circumstances under which you will operate.

We find the most successful applications evidence this criteria by explaining their organisation's processes by following the qualification/assessment lifecycle. We are interested in what your processes might reveal about your competence in assessment. This approach also allows you to explain how you might tackle associated issues such as malpractice, complaints and appeals. You may wish to provide us with additional information, such as a commentary on certain processes, to help us to gauge your understanding.

For example, in the development of an EPA, what are the processes that you will follow to meet the expectations of the assessment plan? What are you going to do to implement that plan? How will you develop the assessment expected in each assessment plan? How will you ensure that assessments and student performances consistently meet the required standards?

Here's a specific example, about a multiple choice or written test.

To demonstrate how you will develop the test, some of the things you should consider are:

- how you are going to develop each item/question in the assessment
- whether you are maintaining an item bank, and if so how do you build it, maintain it etc
- how you will ensure each item/question is valid, reliable, minimises bias and is at the right level of demand
- how you will bring the items together into a paper/test (what is your approach to sampling content/formats, how many questions will you need)
- how you will know the paper is of the right level of demand and is a valid assessment
- how you will establish pass/grade thresholds
- how you will develop the mark scheme for each item/question
- how you will mark it
- what data you will collect to review the performance of the items you have used (and the test overall) and how you will address any issues you may have identified with the items/test/approach
- who will be involved, how you will appoint them, what expertise they need to have, how you will ensure they don't have any conflicts or personal interests
- who will be responsible for approving the questions and papers and therefore checking that they are valid and reliable, and what expertise you expect them to have to do this

To demonstrate how you will deliver the test, you should consider:

- how you will decide whether to offer it online, or paper-based, or both
- how you will develop an IT system to manage, or interface with, test processes
- how you will authenticate the person taking the paper
- how you will ensure the papers were kept securely
- how you will ensure the delivery is manageable at the place it is being taken

Commented [JL1]: Comms – could you box out this example pls

- who will be involved in the delivery of the assessment - is this your staff member(s) or someone else?
- whether the training provider/employer/centre has a role in delivering the assessment. If they are invigilating or handing out a paper you would need to explain how you will have an enforceable agreement with that training provider/employer/centre. This is important because if someone does something wrong, like commit malpractice, you need to be able to take action. This may form part of the agreement you have with them to carry out the EPA for them
- how the candidates' responses will be collected and returned to you

To demonstrate how you would mark candidates' responses, you should consider:

- who will mark the responses and whether they are marked by people or machines
- if marked by people, how you will know they have the right expertise/don't have a conflict of interest
- how you will standardise your markers to ensure that they are marking consistently
- how you will generate a result in accordance with the requirements of the assessment plan
- how you will know these assessments are comparable to others you have set for this qualification that are taken at different places and over time, and the standard is maintained
- how you will identify wrongdoing such as malpractice or maladministration

You may already have provided some of this evidence when addressing Criteria A or C1(a) (governance, conflicts of interest, IT systems, resources, job descriptions/role profiles, centre approval, enforceable agreements, reasonable adjustments etc). This is fine, you do not need to repeat it – just tell us where we can find the information. A well referenced application makes this much easier and quicker for us to review.

This is only an example of the sort of information we will look for in your application. Many of the points in this example also relate to the other forms of assessment you will be using.

Qualification terminology

Awarding Organisation

The term awarding organisation applies to End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs). This is because once an EPAO is successful at gaining Ofqual recognition they are part of the regulated community of awarding organisations. Our recognition process is the same for EPAOs and awarding organisations.

Centres

Centres are organisations undertaking the delivery of an assessment to apprentices on behalf of an awarding organisation. Centres are typically educational institutions, training providers, or employers. In an EPA context an employer that delivers an assessment or part of an assessment will meet the definition of a centre.

Regulated qualification

A qualification that is offered by a recognised awarding organisation within the scope of its recognition. An EPA is classed as a qualification for this purpose. This is because the EPA is subject to regulation; just as other qualifications are.

Results

This refers to the summary of results published by an EPAO.

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