



Babcock Briefing

End Point Assessment: making the right choices

This article provides insight on End Point Assessments (EPAs), with particular focus on how employers should engage the best End Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) to meet their needs.

If you already understand the mechanics of EPA then jump straight to Section 2 which looks at how to choose the best EPAO to suit your needs. If you're starting out with apprenticeships, or want to learn more about assessments and their providers, Section 1 will be useful to you.

We hope you find what we have shared useful and look forward to providing more EPA insight later in the year.

Section 1: Getting to know EPAs and EPAOs

What is an EPA?

EPA is a key component of the new apprenticeship standards and assessment plans.

Developed by employer groups (Trailblazers) who create the assessment specification alongside the standard design, EPAs are a challenging final evaluation of apprenticeship training. The assessments rigorously test competence, skills and behaviours gained through the training programme, defining an apprentice's success or failure on programme.

This approach differs from the models used previously and involves, as one would expect from an employer-led system, far greater interaction and accountability for assessments from employers.

How does EPA work?

EPA is the means of synoptically assessing what your apprentice has learnt during their apprenticeship.

Each apprenticeship standard (currently over 200, with 300 more in production) is different in its EPA approach and is designed to meet the needs of the industry, not specific employers within it.

For apprentices to be successful in their EPA they need to be fully prepared for each assessment type required for their qualification. Typical end-point assessment methods include:



Multiple-choice
online tests



Written
exams



Practical
demonstrations



Professional
discussions



Observations

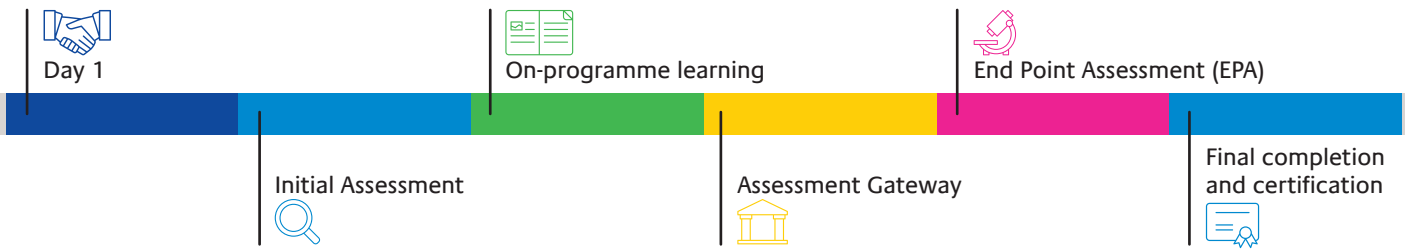


Projects and
presentations

Before progressing to EPA apprentices must pass through a gateway with their training provider and employer. As the employer you are responsible for signing off an apprentice as ready for EPA. If, through the use of mock exams and testing, an EPAO does not feel an apprentice is ready for EPA they can ask for more training to be completed before commencement of the final assessment.

Success at EPA means that the programme has been completed satisfactorily and the apprentice will be rewarded with the appropriate certification to prove this. Failure of the EPA will trigger a re-assessment process. Bear in mind that, for some standards, the number of retakes is capped.

Apprenticeship Programme Structure



What is an EPAO?

EPAOs are approved to deliver a specific EPA by the Education & Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). Registration on the [ESFA Register of Apprentice Assessment Organisations \(RoAAO\)](#) is required by an EPAO for every standard they wish to deliver an EPA against and is only possible once they have demonstrated rigorous quality control, provision of the right type of assessors and use of the right tools for that particular assessment.

The register should be your first port of call to understand which EPAOs are offering EPA for which standards. There are links on the register to each EPAO where you can see further details around each EPAO's offer and proposition.

The vast majority of apprenticeships have at least one, if not multiple approved EPAOs, but it's worth noting that there are still a number of standards which don't have a EPAOs registered.

As each apprenticeship standard is different, so are the requirements for delivering EPA. Each EPAO must therefore demonstrate the following for every standard they want to be registered for:

- The relevant industry knowledge and experience
- The right type and number of assessors to service the needs of their customer/s
- The correct quality processes and procedures to support fair and equal opportunity assessment
- The depth in their organisational structure to ensure high quality delivery and management

EPAOs are independent of apprenticeship training providers and staff involved in EPA cannot have been involved with the training element of an apprentice's programme. EPAOs who operate in the same business group as apprenticeship training providers, (of which there are many examples), maintain strict rules of separation which are audited externally by the ESFA.

How much will EPA cost?

If you are a Levy-paying employer, EPAs are paid for using a percentage of your apprenticeship fund. The maximum amount that an EPAO can draw down from the funding is set by the ESFA and varies across standards, up to 20% of the funding band maximum value. If you don't pay the Levy, EPA costs are met through the funding available from government and mandatory contribution.

EPAOs are not mandated to provide services on demand; they will evaluate each opportunity on its financial or commercial merits.

EPAOs can provide you with their list prices to undertake the assessments of a given standard. To avoid the risk of unforeseen additional costs, (which will have to be paid from non-funded budgets), it is highly recommended that you finalise EPA arrangements before making apprenticeship training provider commitments.

Don't forget!

If adequate EPA support is not on offer from a potential EPAO you should evaluate the price vs value equation for your business: the price is what you pay but the value is what you receive!

What are your responsibilities as an employer?

- Choosing the best EPA (as well as training provider) to meet your needs
- Developing your specific assessment process in collaboration with your EPAO
- Ensuring the percentage of the max cap required for EPA has been set aside
- Signing off each apprentice as ready for EPA

Section 2: Tips for successful EPAO selection

Selecting the right EPAO

Good training partner and EPAO selection is critical to programme success; decisions impact your people, brand and workforce planning capability. Having identified the EPAO(s) approved for the required apprenticeship standard, you should assess each of them against various criteria (see the checklist for our suggestions).

Don't forget!

For the best results you should be engage an EPAO early in your programme design stage to ensure the right assessment process is in place and has been tried, tested and documented prior to training commencement.

EPAO checklist

✓ What experience are they offering?

Check for the depth of their subject matter expertise and their track record of creating tailored assessments for customers whilst assessing against the national standard.

✓ How do they ensure a good quality of service?

Ask about their procedures and processes, including safeguarding and data security, and try to get references from their existing customers.

✓ What is their approach to assessment?

If they are using technology solutions to reduce face-to-face assessment time, understand how it works and if it's a viable approach for your business. Challenge if the use of certain technology could impact the quality of assessments.

✓ How collaborative are they?

If your apprenticeship programme is specialised for your industry, quiz potential EPAOs on their understanding and experience of your sector. Also establish how collaboratively they will work with you to design an adequate assessment process that meets both the formal assessment specification and the needs of your business.

✓ What added support are they providing?

Good practice among EPAOs is to issue guides, mock exams, gateway packs and other tools to help you and your learners to prepare for their EPA. Check your potential EPAOs do this. Also explore how the EPAO will collaborate with you to ensure their delivery meets the expectations and needs of your business and apprentices.

✓ Are they ready now?

Is the EPAO ready to deliver now and can they support you with programme design? Even though apprenticeships take a minimum of 12 months to complete, it is important you engage with an EPAO early to maximise pass rates, especially as the number of retakes for some standards is capped.

✓ Who are they deploying to undertake the EPA?

EPAOs are approaching resourcing in a number of different ways which can include:

- Using contractors to deliver EPA
- Using contractors or a training provider to invigilate tests/ exams
- Directly employing their own EPA assessors and/ or invigilators

Consider any continuity risks if changes to personnel are applied during the programme lifetime. Also ensure the personnel used to undertake EPA have the correct level knowledge and experience of your particular industry.

👉 Don't forget!

Ensure your potential EPAO's services are underpinned by rigorous internal and external quality assurance and that their standards of assessment are best practice.

Key Takeaways

- Choice of the correct EPAO is essential for apprenticeship programme success
- When selecting an EPAO ask the right questions to ensure the quality and value of support offered is right
- Choose an EPAO ready to engage before the commencement of apprenticeship programmes

How can Babcock support you?

Here at Babcock we have two End Point Assessment Organisations to undertake apprenticeship EPAs across the business and Energy & Engineering sectors. Our EPAOs currently offer a range of assessment services across 13 apprenticeship standards, with more under development. We pride ourselves on offering impartial and independent delivery of EPAs, as well as working collaboratively with employers and their apprentices to prepare them for a successful completion of their apprenticeship.

Both Babcock Assessments Limited and Babcock Engineering Assessments Limited, are listed on the Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations. They are independent parts of the FTSE 250 Babcock International Group which has a track record of quality training and assessment delivery to the work-based sector.

Find out more about Babcock's EPAOs [here](#).

