



Institute for Apprenticeships
& Technical Education

EQA Framework

August 2020

Explanation of this document

This document presents a draft of a revised framework for the External Quality Assurance (EQA) of apprenticeship end-point assessment. It is to be considered alongside the consultation published by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education ('the Institute') on the future EQA system. This document should only be read alongside the consultation and does not replace the current EQA framework published on the Institute's website.

In order to operationalise the proposed future EQA system, the Institute is proposing a number of changes to the published EQA framework. The changes proposed to the framework are:

- The sections of the EQA framework that cover registration and readiness of End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) in sections 2 and 3 have been revised to reflect the different requirements of a system where all EPAOs will require registration with Ofqual and / or the Office for Students (OfS), alongside or in advance of being accepted onto the Register of End-Point Assessment Organisations.
- Section 4 of the EQA framework sets out the approach to EQA monitoring that will be undertaken in order to evaluate that EPA is of sufficient quality. Both Ofqual and OfS operate a risk-based regulatory approach in other areas (i.e. outside apprenticeship EQA). We believe that there is value in an approach that captures the best of both models – ensuring that quality is monitored and evaluated across all standards, whilst also considering the risk that each EPAO and standard poses to successful delivery to allow focus of activity. The revised framework captures this. All EPAOs would be assessed against each standard on at least a triennial basis.
- Section 5 of the EQA framework which covers how EQA providers report to EPAOs and to the Institute. As set out in the preceding bullet point, the proposed changes would move EQA from a system where each EPAO is quality assured on each standard on an annual basis to a more risk-based system, whilst maintaining a triennial review of each EPAO on each standard as a minimum. Ofqual/OfS will provide the Institute with a detailed report on EPA delivery as agreed in an annual workplan. The Institute will then generate a grading from this report, using the four-point scale set out in the framework, and inform the EPAO to enable them to understand how their performance sits relative to best practice.
- Section 7 of the EQA framework which covers how action will be taken to deal with problems in EQA delivery has been changed to reflect the fact that Ofqual and OfS, as regulators, have a different range of actions available to them and explains how they may be used and the role of the Institute in overseeing this system.
- An Annex has been added to set out the role which professional and employer-led bodies will have in supporting Ofqual and OfS's delivery.
- Section 1 (assessment plans); section 6 (improving assessment) and section 8 (continuous improvement) will remain essentially unchanged from the originally published framework.
- In addition, a number of small changes have been made to the drafting of the document to make individual sections clearer and incorporate learning from the first eight months of operation.

The current EQA framework remains in place for EQA of apprenticeship end-point assessment during the consultation and during any transition to new arrangements following the consultation.

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Introduction

Quality is central to the government's reform of apprenticeships. The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (the Institute) has a statutory duty to secure that evaluations of the quality of apprenticeship assessments, in relation to assessment plans published under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009, are carried out. External Quality Assurance (EQA) is the process by which this is delivered.

Every apprentice who completes their apprenticeship standard must undertake a holistic independent End Point Assessment (EPA) to confirm that they have achieved occupational competence. The nature of the EPA for each apprenticeship standard is set out in an assessment plan, developed by employers and approved by the Institute. This assessment is then delivered by an independent end-point assessment organisation (EPAO)¹ selected by the employer. External Quality Assurance ensures the quality, relevance and reliability of assessment regardless of which organisation delivers it and wherever and whenever that assessment is taken.

EQA is the independent evaluation that an apprentice has undergone a quality EPA that assesses occupational competence at the end of their apprenticeship. It is designed to ensure that apprenticeship EPA is meeting employers' needs, including consistency and validity of delivery, process and outcomes, as specified in the published apprenticeship standard and assessment plan. It is crucial that employers are confident that anyone who has completed an apprenticeship is competent in the occupation for which they have trained; EQA is fundamental to the credibility of apprenticeships. Equally, it is essential that all apprentices have a high-quality experience of EPA, and are confident that the assessment is fair; that they have been assessed to the same standard, whichever EPAO conducts their assessment and wherever and whenever it is taken.

Three tiers of assurance

Ensuring the quality of EPA is crucial and, in order to secure this, three tiers of assurance exist within the EPA system:

- the first tier is undertaken by the EPAOs who use Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) to ensure that their assessments are valid and reliable.
- the second tier assures that assessments comply with the requirements of the assessment plan and meet the needs of employers and apprentices, and that these assessments are fair, comparable and consistent. This will be undertaken by Ofqual and OfS, and supported by professional and employer-led bodies where suitable bodies are available.
- the third tier is the work done by the Institute to oversee and assure the quality of the oversight of EPA, including a coherent risk management process and the outcomes of EQA provision.

This document's focus is on the second and third tier, specifying the Institute's EQA framework for ensuring that EPA is consistently high quality across all occupational routes, apprenticeship standards and EPAOs.

The eight step framework

There are eight steps within the framework, encompassing upfront quality control mechanisms, ongoing quality assurance, and continuous improvement:

¹ This organisation will need to be either an Ofqual-recognised awarding organisation (AO) or higher education provider (HEP)

1. setting out the right approach to assessing occupational competence via **clear end-point assessment plans that have been developed by employers**, reviewed by Route Panels and approved by the Institute as fit-for-purpose.
2. ensuring that only **recognised organisations** with the relevant experience and expertise deliver assessment.
3. ensuring that EPAOs are thoroughly **prepared to deliver** high-quality assessments, including through readiness checks.
4. ensuring that EPA is a **high-quality and relevant assessment of occupational competence**, as specified in the assessment plan, through a programme of risk-based activity, that includes observation of delivery supported by professional and employer-led bodies where appropriate.
5. reporting on the quality of EPAs and using **evidence and intelligence** to support the development of and improve the performance of individual EPAOs and the system.
6. **using EQA as a basis to:**
 - a. improve apprenticeship standards and assessment plans;
 - b. raise any other aspect of apprenticeship quality; and
 - c. form a view of risk that is specific to apprenticeship assessment and provides the basis for a risk based approach to quality assurance.
7. **taking action** to ensure that any inadequate EPA practices are remedied promptly, thereby minimising any risk to the quality of assessment.
8. **continuous improvement of EQA process** to capture good practice and ensure that EQA is operating effectively and consistently, and provides evidence of impact to the Institute and others.

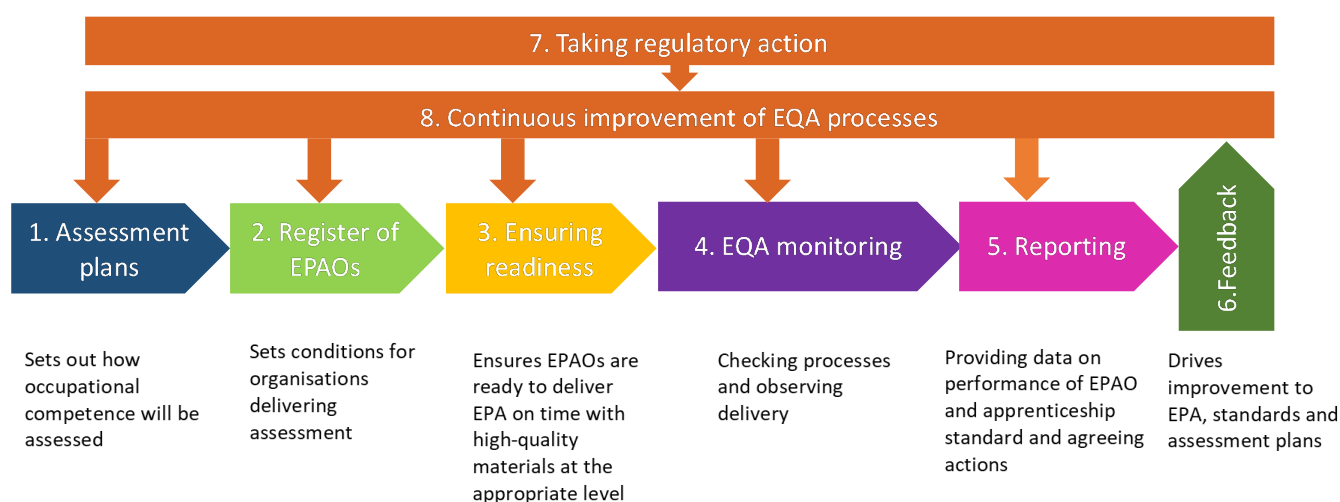


Figure 1 - EQA 8-step framework

While the Institute has statutory responsibility to ensure that EQA is conducted and, with its employer-members on the 15 Route Panels, for the review of assessment plans, there are a number of other organisations who play a key role in the quality assurance system. The roles each organisation plays at each stage in the assurance of EPA is set out in each section of this document.

Ofqual will act as the EQA provider for the majority of apprenticeship standards, and the Office for Students (OfS) for integrated degree apprenticeships.

Equally it is important that input into this process is taken from professional and employer-led bodies to give confidence that the EPA remains occupationally relevant. An employer group ('trailblazer group') designs the apprenticeship standard and assessment plan. Through this process, the Trailblazer nominates an Institute approved professional or employer-led body to work with Ofqual or OfS, where they consider that such an organisation is able to deliver assurance to employers and apprentices, about the quality, relevance and reliability of assessment for the standard. Further details of the register of professional and employer-led bodies are at Annex 1.

A number of organisations were previously recognised by the Institute as able to fulfil the full EQA function, following a rigorous due-diligence process. In some instances the professional body may have a role issuing a licence to practise for the sector and this role will need to be appropriately accommodated within the EQA approach. The involvement of professional and employer-led bodies enables the Institute to assure that assessment is occupationally relevant in practice and delivers reliable outcomes that employers and apprentices value, and also allows ongoing feedback to be provided to employers on how apprenticeship assessment is performing in their sector. Professional and employer-led bodies will do this through supporting Ofqual and OfS, including in evaluating assessment materials and observations of a sample of live assessment delivery. The findings from these activities feed into Ofqual and OfS' work and, together with further evaluation and feedback from employers and apprentices, drive continuous improvement.

The Institute works closely with all organisations to support the quality and consistency of EQA. This framework will ensure that those involved in the delivery and quality assurance of apprenticeship assessment have a clear understanding of their role and their accountabilities, as well as what they can expect from the other organisations involved.

EQA principles

We have developed a set of principles that underpin our policies, practices, behaviours and actions. The unifying purpose of these principles is the desire to achieve the right outcome for apprentices and employers and to contribute to the transformation of the skills landscape:

Table 1 - EQA principles

EQA Principles		
Delivery of EPA is:	Relevant	The EPA is current and genuinely measures occupational competence. Achievement of the apprenticeship is a dependable predictor of success in the occupation.
	Reliable	The EPA produces consistent outcomes irrespective of context, cohort, timing or the organisations involved.

Quality assurance of EPA is:	Efficient	The process is high-quality, easy to use, cost-effective and facilitates the entry of new employers and EPAOs. To ensure that the right aspects of quality are measured, the right activity is undertaken by the right people, at the right time, and enabled by a digital system that generates actionable Management Information and supports a risk-based approach that is specific to apprenticeship assessment.
	Positive	EPA is trusted and respected by employers, apprentices and providers to deliver the right outcomes. The experience is open, transparent and accessible.
	Learning	Continuous improvement is embedded in all areas of the EQA framework to ensure an enduringly proactive and progressive approach to quality.

1. End-Point Assessment plans

Ensuring that the end-point assessment plans that employer groups develop are robust and high-quality, and lead to the delivery of valid, manageable and cost-effective assessments of occupational competence.

Why is this important?

It is vital that all apprentices complete a high-quality EPA and that this is delivered consistently, irrespective of where or when they undertake it, and which EPAO delivers it. The assessment plan is the document that sets out for each particular standard which assessment methods will be used, and how they will be deployed to assess the apprentices' occupational competence at the end of their apprenticeship. Effective quality control is essential to ensure that this plan clearly and accurately sets out how the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) will be assessed, and can be interpreted consistently by different EPAOs. Equally, it is important, that employers have confidence that it will assess whether an apprentice does have the KSBs that demonstrate competence in the occupation.

What do we do to ensure it?

Assessment plans are developed by trailblazer groups - groups of employers from across an occupation who come together to develop an apprenticeship. This ensures that the knowledge, skills and behaviours which will be gained through the apprenticeship and assessed via the EPA, are relevant and appropriate for the occupation. The Institute supports the development of assessment plans, and works with Trailblazers to ensure that the assessment plan delivers what they, as employers and experts in that field, understand to be an accurate, fair and relevant measure of occupational competence.

All assessment plans are subject to public consultation, they are reviewed by independent peer reviewers, who are industry experts, and by education advisors, who bring additional assessment expertise. Ofqual, or OfS will confirm to the trailblazer that they will provide EQA prior to submission and provide high level advice to the Institute post submission, in line with agreed timelines. All of this advice is fed through, in the first instance, to a route panel of representative employers who are experts across their industry. Route panel members provide their expertise and strategic views when making recommendations. Recommendations are approved by the Institute's Approvals and Funding Committee. Having considered the EQA provider's advice the Institute will amend and approve an EPA plan, Ofqual will adopt it into regulation as necessary and similarly OfS in their equivalent process. If the Route Panel judges that there are over-riding occupational justifications for not following the advice from Ofqual/OfS', these will be made known to the EQA Provider who will agree an approach that mitigates any risks and monitors the performance of the standard, reporting back to the Route Panel as necessary.

In approving an assessment plan the Institute takes account of whether the plan has met six criteria. These are listed below:

Table 2 - Assessment plan criteria

Criteria	End-point assessment requirements	How will this be tested?
Deliver valid and accurate judgements of occupational competence	The methods of assessment must be fit for purpose and appropriate to the content of the occupational profile. They must include synoptic assessment delivered using a mixture of valid methods that will lead to an integrated EPA at the end of the programme.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate the methods of assessment proposed against the occupational profile duties and KSBs to determine whether the methods taken together will assure occupational competence in the workplace. • Evaluate whether there is sufficient information in the plan for the EPAOs to develop and deliver valid assessment tools.
Produce consistent and reliable judgements	The assessment methodology and tools used must ensure that employers can have confidence that apprentices assessed in different places, at different times, by different assessors have been judged in the same way and to have therefore reached the same standard of occupational competence.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check that the methodology and tools required will optimally assess the stated KSBs. • Check that the description of assessment methods contains enough detail for different EPAOs to develop and deliver comparable assessment in different places and times.
Ensure independence	The plan must ensure that the organisation delivering the assessment and the individual assessors making assessment decisions are independent of the training provider, the employer and the apprentice. For integrated Degree Apprenticeships the organisation does not have to be independent but the individual assessor should be.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Check that the plan clearly sets out how independence will be ensured for both the training provider, the EPAO and the individual assessors.
Grading	<p>Apprenticeships should be graded using at least one level above pass for the EPA as a whole.</p> <p>The grading should be appropriate and applicable to assessments produced by EPAOs.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Confirm that the plan includes at least one grade above pass for the synoptic method and EPA as a whole and that these are appropriately described, clearly showing what an apprentice would need to do to achieve each grade. • Confirm that a grading exemption has been granted where appropriate. • Confirm the grading descriptors are appropriate and can be interpreted consistently.

Feasibility, manageability, and value for money	This should be ensured within the constraints of funding policy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use experience of other EPA plans to check whether the assessments can be practically delivered within the defined constraints and to the specified scale at reasonable cost.
Enables EPAOs to make reasonable adjustments	Reasonable adjustments for conducting an EPA, in compliance with equality legislation, should be in place.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check that the assessment methods proposed promote accessibility for all apprentices.

Which organisations are involved?

Trailblazer groups of employers develop the assessment plans to ensure that they set out an occupationally appropriate assessment methodology, linked to any requirements of a professional body in the sector, where appropriate; and, if appropriate, nominate a professional or employer-led body to support Ofqual or OfS in the delivery of EQA.

The Institute scrutinises, through its Route Panels, peer reviewers and education advisors, and approves, through its Approvals and Funding Committee, assessment plans to ensure that: they reflect the occupation; that the methods of assessment are appropriate and can be applied consistently; that they meet our assessment criteria; and are of equally high quality across standards and routes. The Institute has statutory responsibility to regularly review apprenticeship standards and assessment plans. In the event that there is no longer an active trailblazer group, the Institute will take steps to reinstate.

Ofqual/OfS will provide high-level advice to the Institute ahead of approval by the Institute about whether the assessment can be regulated to meet the Institute’s mission. Having taken this into account, the Institute will approve the assessment plan.

Delivering in accordance with our principles

- **relevant** – assessment plans measure occupational competence using relevant methodology, and the knowledge, skills and behaviours assessed are predictors of success in the occupation after passing the apprenticeship.
- **reliable** – assessment criteria ensure that assessment plans are clear, comprehensive and unambiguous so that apprentices receive fair outcomes regardless of the EPAO.
- **efficient** – the approach to assessment plan approval uses the right occupational and assessment expertise at the right points in the process to ensure the right decisions are made in a timely manner.
- **positive** – approach ensures a positive experience by focussing on accessibility, openness and transparency.
- **learning** – the Institute continually seeks to learn from experience and improve its processes for developing and approving assessment plans. Through its accountability for the assurance of the whole of EQA, the Institute is properly and uniquely placed to ensure that lessons from EPA and EQA are reflected in assessment plans.

The process

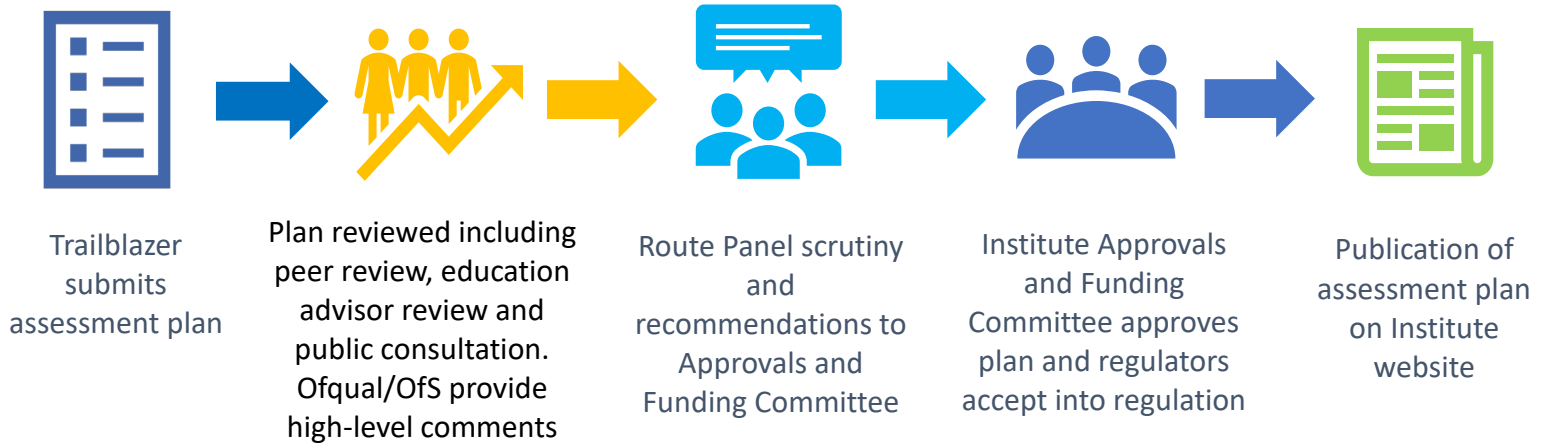


Figure 2 - End-point assessment plan approval process

2. The Registration Process for End-Point Assessment Organisations

Ensuring that EPA is only delivered by high-quality organisations possessing the relevant assessment and occupational expertise, and access to sufficient, experienced and suitably qualified assessors.

Why is this important?

Delivery of EPA by organisations that are proven to have the sector and assessment expertise, capacity and capability, will help to ensure that apprentices have a rigorous and fair experience of assessment, and will increase employer confidence in EPA as a relevant and reliable test of occupational competence.

What do we do to ensure it?

A single, unified, registration process applies to all EPAOs. The registration process provides assurance that all EPAOs are organisationally sound, and have the relevant experience, capacity and capability to deliver the scope of their intended EPA offering.

All EPAOs are required to complete the registration process. Having successfully done so an EPAO will be:

- registered by the ESFA on the register of end-point assessment organisations (RoEPAO) against the specific standards they have applied for and;
- recognised by Ofqual to award qualifications which include as an organisation with a Scope of Recognition encompassing the relevant apprenticeship EPAs; or
- recognised by OfS to deliver the relevant apprenticeship EPAs.

In a small number of cases it may be the case that the EPAO for a particular standard is directly contracted by the regulator for that profession. These exceptional circumstances will be approved by the Institute on a case by case basis.

The registration process entails:

- due diligence checks by the ESFA as the accounting officer for public funds that EPAOs will receive.
- due diligence checks by Ofqual/OfS who are accountable for the delivery and assessment standards of end point assessment from the organisations they regulate.

The ESFA's checks will centre on organisational structure, capacity and financial health (this will only need to happen the first time that an organisation applies to the RoEPAO process).

Ofqual will require EPAOs to demonstrate that they meet its Criteria for Recognition. These require the EPAO to evidence that they have the organisational arrangements, resources, systems and assessment competence to develop, deliver and assess the specific EPAs which it seeks to deliver.

The ESFA, Ofqual, OfS and the Institute will share organisational information from the registration application process, for example where their own due diligence checks require it. They will do this in order to minimise the burden on applicants and to increase efficiency.

Prospective new EPAOs are required to complete the full register process. Existing EPAOs seeking to expand their EPA offering are required to re-apply and complete elements of the process to confirm their capacity and capability for additional apprenticeship standards. Successful completion of the registration

process will allow employers to select the EPAO for their apprentices and facilitate the ESFA’s provision of funds for the delivery of EPAs.

The table below outlines what this would mean for organisations in different situations. This uses the example of Ofqual recognition as they will provide the majority of EQA, however, the principle will be the same for OfS recognised providers.

Type of organisation	RoEPAO	Ofqual Recognition
New organisation not yet operating as an EPAO or recognised by Ofqual/OfS	Will need to follow the full register process	Will need to submit a full application to Ofqual
Organisation on the RoEPAO but not yet recognised by Ofqual / OfS	No further action is required	Will need to submit a full application to Ofqual, indicating that they are already on the RoEPAO. Ofqual will seek information and / or assurance from ESFA, regarding this applicant
Organisation on the RoEPAO and recognised by Ofqual/OfS but not yet recognised for the relevant EPA	No further action is required	Will need to apply to Ofqual to expand their scope of recognition for a specific apprenticeship standard
Existing Ofqual recognised AO or OfS recognised HEP applying to become an EPAO for the first time	Will need to follow the full register process ESFA will seek information and / or assurance from Ofqual, regarding this applicant	Will need to apply to Ofqual to expand their scope of recognition for a specific apprenticeship standard

The Institute will raise with Ofqual any intelligence, evidence or issues to inform the appropriate recognition processes.

Which organisations are involved?

The **ESFA** oversees the administration of the RoEPAO, including approving applications.

Ofqual and OfS recognise the EPAOs as either AOs or Higher Education Providers (HEPs)

The **Institute** sets the quality criteria for being on the RoEPAO, and will raise with ESFA, Ofqual or OfS any intelligence, evidence or issues to inform the appropriate recognition processes.

Delivering in accordance with our principles

- **relevant** – organisations must apply against each standard they wish to deliver, demonstrating that they have specific, relevant expertise in both the occupation and assessment.
- **reliable** – the same conditions are set and applied to every organisation wishing to offer end point assessments against a specific standard.
- **positive** – the processes and conditions for this registration process, including those for the RoEPAO and application to Ofqual / OfS are accessible to all who wish to apply and can meet the quality needs of the system.
- **efficient** – the process facilitates entry to the market by new EPAOs through a system and process that is easy to use and by providing guidance and support to new entrants whilst keeping our standards high.
- **learning** – EPAOs are supported by EQA providers; the processes for registration are reviewed to ensure learning from good practice.

3. Ensuring Readiness

Ensuring that EPAOs are ready and able to deliver assessment at the point at which they are needed by employers and apprentices.

Why is this important?

EPAOs must be ready to deliver assessment at the point at which an apprentice successfully completes their training programme and is confirmed as ready to take the end-point assessment by their employer and training providers.

What do we do to ensure it?

Following registration, an EPAO will develop the assessment materials and specification, and the EPAs as individual products will be entered on to the Ofqual Register against the specific apprenticeship standards they have been recognised to offer. The EPA entry on the Register will identify the operational start date, amongst other information, so it is clear when Ofqual expects the EPA to be ready and compliant with the requirements set out in their Conditions. Equivalent processes will be put in place for other EQA providers.

Once an EPAO has completed the registration process they will have to take steps to meet any conditions associated with their successful application and develop the EPA and attend to any other conditions associated with their successful application.

Prior to delivery EPAOs will be expected to declare readiness and at this point readiness compliance with any conditions applied at the point of registration will be further checked by Ofqual through technical evaluation of assessment materials and related activities including EPAO self-reporting; and review of support materials, EPA delivery plans, assessor recruitment and training, and policies and procedures including internal quality assurance.

Where a professional or employer-led body has been nominated by the Trailblazer and included on the Institute's register, they will support Ofqual/OfS in the checks of assessment and support materials to ensure that they meet the needs of employers in the sector.

This final review of readiness, which will be undertaken by Ofqual/OfS, will be completed prior to the date of the first EPA. It will confirm that the EPAO is ready to deliver assessment for the specific standard. It may be that some EPAOs who are almost ready to deliver will be required to comply with further conditions before they can commence EPA delivery and which will be a focus of ongoing EQA monitoring. EPAOs considered as 'not ready to deliver' must make all changes identified by Ofqual/OfS and will undergo a further readiness check before they can deliver any EPA. Determinations on readiness will be shared with the Institute and the EPAO.

Table 3 sets out what readiness looks like in each of the five areas that will be reviewed.

Table 4 sets out indicative lines of enquiry for these readiness checks, aligned to the five principles of this EQA framework.

Table 3 – how readiness will be assessed by EQA providers

EQA provider readiness check	Ready to deliver
Assessment materials	<p>All materials in place and pitched at the right level and covering the right content for the standard.</p> <p>Ready to deliver with conditions – for example: Most materials are in place and pitched at the right level, covering the right content for the standard with clear plans to develop remaining content.</p>
Support materials	<p>Clear and accessible material pitched at the right level.</p> <p>Material clearly differentiates for different audiences (e.g. employer, apprentice, training provider).</p> <p>Range of different material (e.g. templates or timeline setting out the apprentice journey).</p> <p>Ready to deliver with conditions – for example: Generic EPA information available but more work needed to meet the specific needs of the standard.</p>
EPA delivery plans	<p>Robust plans in place to deliver occupation-specific EPA. Effective and regular communication with employers.</p> <p>Contingency plans in place.</p> <p>Ready to deliver with conditions – for example: Plans in place for delivery but engagement with employers has not yet taken place. Plans may be generic with insufficient occupational detail.</p>
Assessor recruitment	<p>Sufficient assessors in place to meet immediate demand and geographic coverage.</p> <p>Assessors have good occupational and assessment expertise.</p> <p>Training and standardisation undertaken.</p> <p>Ready to deliver with conditions – for example: Some assessors in place and clear plans to recruit to full capacity. Assessors have satisfactory occupational and assessment expertise. Training and standardisation booked in.</p>

EQA provider readiness check	Ready to deliver
Policies and procedures - including Internal Quality Assurance ('IQA')	<p>Workable policies in place which clearly meet the specific needs of the Standard.</p> <p>Reasonable review dates in place.</p> <p>Clear ownership at right levels within the organisation including management.</p> <p>Ready to deliver with conditions – for example: Workable policies in place but may be generic and need further adaptation to meet the needs of the standard.</p>

Table 4 - Lines of enquiry - EQA provider readiness check

	Lines of enquiry				
	Relevant	Reliable	Efficient	Positive	Learning
Assessment materials	<p>Are materials appropriate to the standard and level of the apprenticeship?</p> <p>Are they specific to the role and reflecting recognised and current practice within the industry?</p>	<p>Will materials allow for consistent, valid and fair assessment of occupational competence?</p> <p>Will they allow appropriate grading judgements to be made?</p> <p>How is the security of materials managed? Has any assessment software been thoroughly tested?</p>	<p>Are assessment materials being developed and used efficiently?</p>	<p>Are materials accessible to all apprentices including those for whom reasonable adjustments will be made?</p>	<p>Pilots/trials with people already employed in these roles?</p> <p>Systematic and genuine industry feedback</p>

	Lines of enquiry				
	Relevant	Reliable	Efficient	Positive	Learning
Support materials	Are materials appropriate to the Standard and level of the apprenticeship? Do they reflect current/standard industry practices? Are they regularly updated? Would employers recognise their relevance?	Do materials accurately describe and/ or represent the assessment that an apprentice will undertake?	Are materials available digitally and at no extra charge?	Are they clear and accessible?	Who have materials been tested with? What feedback processes are built in?
EPA delivery plans	Are they appropriate to delivering the assessment specified in the EPA plan?	Will they produce reliable results over venue and time and for all apprentices, regardless of their specific characteristics? Are they suitable for all apprentices?	Are the plans realistic and appropriate for delivering the likely volume?	Do training providers and employers understand what is required and support the process?	Which groups and what criteria have they been tested with? Are their specific diversity checks built in as standard? What is the feedback process?

	Lines of enquiry				
	Relevant	Reliable	Efficient	Positive	Learning
Assessor recruitment and training	Do the assessors recruited have the appropriate and up-to-date occupational and assessment skills, and meet any specific requirements as set out in the assessment Plan?	Does the EPAO have appropriate conflict of interest policies, and are they applied across all standards, to ensure that assessors will be independent from apprentices, employers and training providers? Are these standing up to actual delivery on that specific standard?	Has the EPAO recruited sufficient assessors for the likely volume of EPAs to be undertaken?	Are the assessors credible across the industry as people fit to pass apprentices as occupationally competent? Will employers respect their judgement? Is a process in place to promote and monitor assessor CPD?	What is the schedule and quality of assessor training for industry experts?
Policies and procedures IQA	Are the IQA policy and procedures fit for purpose?	Does the organisation have appropriate internal quality assurance arrangements in place?	Do the EPAO's data management processes meet the needs of the standard?	Is the EPAO engaging appropriately with employers and providers to ensure that apprentices are prepared for their EPA?	Has the EPAO responded to the EQA provider recommendations?

Ofqual/OfS will share readiness reports with the EPAO and with the Institute using the digital system.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs submit an application to the RoEPAO and provide all information requested. EPAOs must also engage actively with Ofqual/OfS.

Ofqual/OfS undertake a readiness evaluation when an EPAO has said they will be ready to deliver assessments for each standard.

The **Institute** oversees the work of EQA providers and ensures that they are delivering consistently, quality assuring assessment on all apprenticeship standards delivered by all end point assessment organisations with appropriate depth and rigour, drawing information from the digital system.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – readiness checks ensure EPAOs are prepared to deliver EPA that will generate accurate assessment of occupational competence.
- **reliable** – readiness checks ensure EPAOs are prepared to deliver EPA consistently, in accordance with the assessment plan.
- **positive** – the readiness process is clear, transparent and supportive, and outcomes of the checks are shared openly with EPAOs and EPAOs provided with advice and support as they need it.
- **efficient** – the process is as simple and easy to follow as possible with clear guidance.
- **learning** – EQA providers will identify areas of improvement for each EPAO and agree an action plan. Early and consistent engagement facilitates opportunities for EPAOs to apply learning.

4. Monitoring EPA

Ensuring that the actual delivery of end-point assessment provides a relevant, reliable and independent assessment of occupational competence.

Why is this important?

Employers need to have confidence that EPA is a relevant and reliable assessment of occupational competence, and that apprentices have a fair and positive experience of the process.

What do we do to ensure it?

EQA provides an independent, expert evaluation of the quality of EPA to make sure that it is delivering to employers' needs, is consistent with the assessment plan and is fair for apprentices.

In order to do this Ofqual/OfS will use their assessment expertise and regulatory powers to monitor the delivery of EPA, outcomes and the technical functioning of assessments. They will report to the Institute on whether there are any risks to a standard and whether it is continuing to deliver high quality assessment in line with the published assessment plan.

Ofqual and OfS will draw on the occupational expertise of relevant professional and employer-led bodies (further detail on these bodies is provided at Annex 1), where it is deemed that there is a suitable body. The Institute will ask each trailblazer group to nominate an appropriate organisation that will give employers in their sector assurance that the EPA remains a relevant and reliable test of occupational competence, where one exists. The Institute will maintain a register of these organisations which Ofqual and OfS will then draw from in undertaking their annual programme of EQA activity. The involvement of the professional and employer-led bodies will be expected to be robust and comprehensive in its coverage and involvement.

All EPAOs will be required to comply with Ofqual's General and EPA specific Conditions or the Office for Students Conditions of Registration. This will provide a first indication of assurance on each EPAO.

EQA providers will proactively monitor and evaluate actual delivery of EPA in order to confirm the suitability of the conduct of assessments with regard to occupational competence, identify and tackle emerging problems, take a view on the quality of delivery, and improve understanding of the risks posed by each EPAO.

Each standard will be reviewed by Ofqual/OfS at least every three years, and in some cases more frequently depending on the level of risk posed. The Institute will agree with Ofqual/OfS a triennial plan for the EQA of all standards within their remit. On an annual basis Ofqual and OfS will agree with the Institute its plan of EQA activity for the forthcoming year. The Institute will establish a Joint Monitoring Committee (JMC) which will work with Ofqual and OfS to review the risks posed across the EPA landscape. This will feed into the understanding of risk that will underpin triennial and annual plans of EQA activity, and identify areas where the quality of assessment may need to be evaluated more frequently than three yearly.

The evaluation of risk will be a multi-dimensional process and will encompass:

- the level of risk considered to be posed by a particular EPAO, which will be informed by Recognition, during readiness activity or from intelligence from other activity, including across the wider qualifications market.

- the risks associated with delivering a particular standard, which may include the overall riskiness of the EPA plan; the number of apprentices on the standard; and the activity of other EPAOs.
- the results of Ofqual/OfS monitoring and apprentice feedback from the Institute's Apprentices Panel.

This assessment of risk will be reviewed and updated at each subsequent EQA review or, when deemed necessary, the frequency and focus of EQA activities will be based on an evaluation of risk and sampling (including random sampling on occasions) and will be agreed with the Institute. Not every desk review or visit, the details of which are below, will look at every aspect of EPA.

Desk-based reviews

Ofqual and OfS, supported by relevant professional and employer-led bodies, will undertake monitoring activities to ascertain that each EPAO is providing high-quality, relevant assessment and that the assessments are in line with the assessment plan and consistent across all EPAOs delivering on that standard. Ofqual and OfS will undertake a programme of desk-based reviews for each apprenticeship standard, looking at information from each EPAO delivering the standard. In doing this they will draw on the input of professional and employer-led bodies as appropriate – for example to review assessment materials. They will be able to access some documentation from ESFA through the Institute's digital system, but will also need to request various data, information and documentation directly from EPAOs, which may include:

- policy documents (application to the specific standard);
- assessment materials – including signing off any major changes;
- support materials;
- strategy for internal quality assurance (IQA);
- details of planning for the EPA service;
- data on EPA including, registrations, pass rates and distribution of grades;
- CVs, qualifications, performance reports and CPD records for assessors;
- feedback from stakeholders, including apprentices, training providers and employers on the relevance and reliability of assessments delivered;
- records of IQA activities, including standardisation and moderation;
- records of any reasonable adjustments or special considerations granted and evidence behind these decisions;
- conflicts of interest records.

Desk reviewers will need expertise in quality assurance and delivering assessment.

Visits and observation of assessment activities

Ofqual and OfS will deploy reviewers with assessment and industry expertise to observe EPA delivery and check that the EPA is being undertaken in a manner that supports the assessment of occupational competence. Ofqual and OfS will work with the professional and employer-led bodies that have been recognised by the Institute. It is important that individuals undertaking such visits have the necessary experience, familiarity and knowledge to judge that EPA is truly assessing occupational competence. Evidence sought may include:

- observations of a sample of assessments, including live assessments. Observations must check that the content and context of assessments are occupationally relevant;
- observation of assessor standardisation or moderation meetings;

- review of training materials;
- review of physical or digital versions of documents, including marked assessment materials from apprentices;
- interviews with assessors and other EPAO staff;
- feedback from apprentices and employers to check how well EPA is meeting their needs, including how well it relates to current business practice;
- checks on IT systems, security and record storage;
- accessibility of assessment including any language bias and reasonable adjustments;
- assessments cover requirements of the assessment plan and occupational competence;
- following up on previous actions and recommendations.

The aspects of EPA which will be quality assured are set out in Table 5. The table also shows whether an aspect will generally be reviewed by a desk-based audit or during a visit. In addition this table shows whether an aspect of EPA will typically be reviewed by Ofqual or OfS, or the appropriate professional or employer-led body for the standard in question. Some things will also be considered over a longer time duration by Ofqual/OfS and the Institute through longitudinal evaluation. These areas are also noted in Table 5 and explained in more detail in section 6 of this document. Ofqual/OfS will choose to request evidence, and organise visits, at their discretion based on, but not limited by: their sampling strategy; previous monitoring evidence; feedback about the EPAO from other parts of the system; or at the Institute's request.

Table 5 - Aspects of EPA to be assured - EQA monitoring

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?			By whom will this usually be assessed?	
	Assessment plan	Conditions of registration	EPAO's policies and procedures	Desk review	Visits / observations	Longitudinal Evaluation	Ofqual / OfS	Professional / employer-led body
Relevant								
individual assessment instruments/methods are fit for purpose	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
assessment is delivered in line with the published EPA plan	✓	✓			✓		✓	✓
EPA team includes expertise in quality assurance, assessment and occupational competent	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓
assessors' knowledge is up-to-date	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Reliable								
assessment is carried out independently in practice	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
assessments are operating effectively and achieving the desired outcomes			✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
grading is applied accurately and consistently	✓			✓	✓	✓	✓	
assessment is reliable and comparable across different EPAOs, employers, places, times and assessors		✓			✓	✓	✓	✓

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?			By whom will this usually be assessed?	
	Assessment plan	Conditions of registration	EPAO's policies and procedures	Desk review	Visits / observations	Longitudinal Evaluation	Ofqual / OfS	Professional / employer-led body
Efficient								
sufficient assessors are available		✓		✓	✓		✓	
accurate records are kept and data is held securely with appropriate protocols in place		✓		✓	✓		✓	
retakes, resits, appeals and complaints handling are operated effectively	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
timeliness of assessment windows			✓	✓		✓	✓	
booking and management of assessment			✓	✓			✓	
marking/remote assessment	✓				✓		✓	
resources for assessment			✓	✓	✓		✓	
evidence gathering and record keeping			✓		✓		✓	
confidentiality			✓		✓		✓	
certification application process including its timeliness and checking any requirements		✓	✓		✓		✓	
employers are choosing EPAOs		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	

Aspect of EPA to be assured	Where will this usually be set out?			How will this usually be assessed?			By whom will this usually be assessed?	
	Assessment plan	Conditions of registration	EPAO's policies and procedures	Desk review	Visits / observations	Longitudinal Evaluation	Ofqual / OfS	Professional / employer-led body
Positive								
access to assessment is fair, and decisions on reasonable adjustments are made fairly and consistently	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	
issue of results and feedback		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
information provided and fees charged are clear and transparent		✓		✓			✓	
all requirements of the standard in terms of achievement of gateways and mandatory qualifications and requirements are achieved prior to sign-off and the employer makes the final decision on the readiness of the apprentice for EPA	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	
Learning								
each EPAO has arrangements to collect and action feedback from apprentices, employers and assessors		✓		✓			✓	✓
Internal Quality Assurance processes carried out by the EPAOs is effective and rigorous	✓			✓	✓		✓	✓

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs comply with requirements of the RoEPAO. This includes providing data and engaging positively with the EQA provider during EQA activities.

Ofqual/OfS deliver EQA including desk-based monitoring and observation of EQA delivery, drawing on the input of **professional and employer-led bodies** to consider aspects of EPA that require occupational expertise.

The **Institute** oversees the EQA Framework and Ofqual and OfS to identify cross-cutting risks and coordinate appropriate responses, ensuring consistency, efficiency and effectiveness, and to look holistically at the delivery of EQA, including conducting longitudinal assessments. The Institute will also draw together issues from EQA activity to share with the Quality Alliance in order to drive broader responses to issues where required.

Delivering our principles

- **relevant** – Ofqual/OfS will work with EPAOs to identify good practice and areas of improvement for the assessment plan to ensure they are unambiguous and valid. They will use organisations with occupational expertise to evaluate EPA on the ground and conducting longitudinal research to confirm relevance over time.
- **reliable** – Ofqual/OfS will ensure EPAs are conducted consistently by all EPAOs and across all cohorts of apprentices through monitoring, support and sharing learning.
- **positive** – Ofqual/OfS set clear expectations and take an open and collaborative approach to EQA monitoring. Views of those undergoing EPA will be taken into account.
- **efficient** – the Institute provides clear process guidance and a digital platform to allow for proactive planning.
- **learning** – EQA monitoring includes the identification and sharing of good practice.

The process

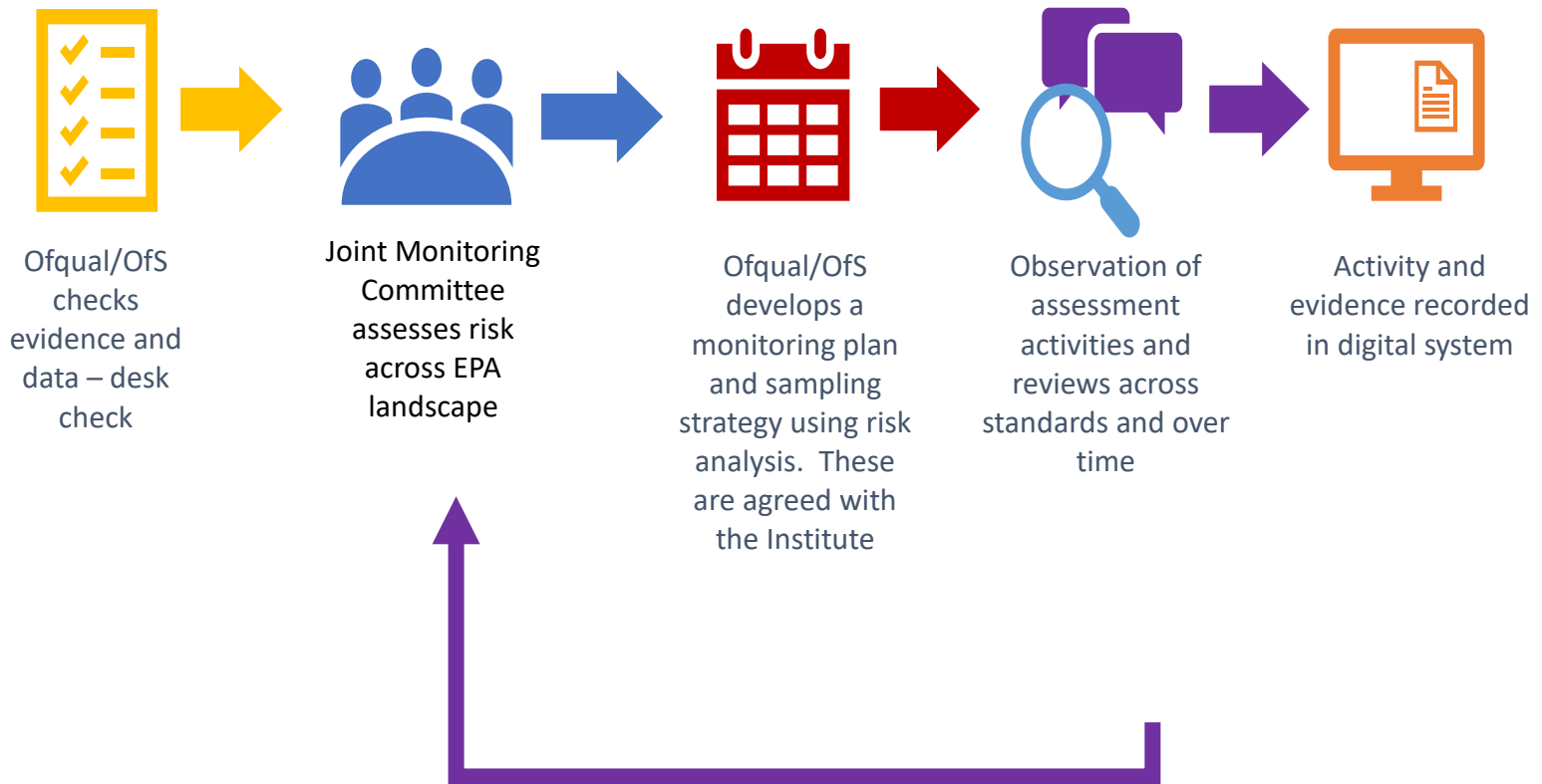


Figure 5 - EQA Monitoring process

5. Reporting

Providing clear reports to EPAOs and the Institute, including examples of good practice, recommendations and action points. Providing evidence to support improvements to the delivery of EPA.

Why is this important?

Understanding trends and continuous improvement is an important element of EQA. Reports should focus on identifying good practice as well as taking action to resolve any issues.

What do we do to ensure it?

The frequency of EQA reviews, and areas of focus will be determined using a risk-based approach, but there will be a minimum of one EQA review in relation to each EPAO every three years. Whilst some assurance can be taken at entity-level, from early EQA findings we have already found that the quality of an EPAO's delivery of one standard will not provide assurance that they are delivering a totally separate standard to the same quality.

Following EQA activity Ofqual/OfS use the digital system to record their evaluations of the quality of the EPAO's delivery of a particular standard and their evidence for this evaluation. This will minimise duplication and ensure risk information and evidence is shared with relevant parties.

Continuous improvement is an important element of EQA. Ofqual/OfS will provide feedback to the EPAO and the Institute's Quality Assurance Committee, setting out their key findings and identifying areas for improvement. Ofqual/OfS will also consider whether any thematic findings may drive improvement at either a standard or systemic level.

In preparing this report Ofqual/OfS will draw on the input of the appropriate professional or employer-led body (as outlined in chapter 4) where applicable. Ofqual/OfS will submit reports to the Institute via the digital system, and the Institute will assign quality ratings on the four point scale set out at Table 6 below. The reports will then be shared with the relevant EPAO provide recommendations for improvement, set out mandatory actions or highlight areas of particular strength. The EPAO will have the opportunity to respond to any factual inaccuracies within the report, and where appropriate submit an action plan to be agreed with Ofqual/OfS. Following this the report will be formally submitted to the Institute using the digital system and shared with the Quality Assurance Committee.

Each EPAO will be offered a placement from 1-4 scale by the Institute, orientated around best practice and informed by data and monitoring information input onto the Institute's digital system by Ofqual/OfS. The report will indicate the overall quality of their assessment for each standard against best practice, the aim of which is to encourage the attainment of best practice by all EPAOs. Ofqual/OfS will submit information against the established lines of enquiry to the Institute's digital system drawn from their monitoring and other relevant activities to support the feedback against best practice to be provided by the Institute. The Institute will consider this information against the established lines of enquiry with indicative characteristics for each grading along each line of enquiry set out below. The Institute will create a report for each EPAO and provide it with a rating against best practice. This rating is purely to inform the

individual EPAO, it is not a competitive rating and will not be published, shared with other EPAOs or anyone else. Because it is purely to assist EPAOs in their quest for continuous improvement, the ratings are not to be used in any marketing or publicity activity by the EPAO.

As well as highlighting good practice and areas for improvement to existing EPAOs, these reports will inform the assessment of risk that each EPAO poses on each standard. Those where the quality of assessment is lower and therefore the risks to satisfactory delivery are higher may be reviewed again more quickly than the three yearly timescale.

The Institute can share the outcomes of reviews with relevant bodies and may consider publishing reports or elements of them at some point in the future. Before making any decisions to publish, the Institute would consult with all stakeholders. No other body, including EPAOs, are to publish elements of specific EPAO reports without prior agreement from the Institute.

Table 6 –The IfATE monitoring rating scale

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
Relevant	<p>Assessments do not validly assess the occupational competence as set out in the assessment plan</p> <p>Assessments are not delivered in line with the assessment plan</p> <p>Assessors lack the occupational or assessment expertise</p> <p>Policies and procedures are generic and not applied to the particular needs of the standard</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence, with some elements requiring improvement</p> <p>Assessments are delivered in line with the assessment plan, but some elements require improvement</p> <p>Assessors possess adequate occupational and assessment expertise, but it may be limited or not kept up-to-date</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence</p> <p>Assessors possess up-to-date knowledge of occupational and Assessment practice. EPAO has robust system in place to manage CPD and training</p> <p>All activity (including application of non-Assessment specific policies) tailored to the needs of the standard in question</p>	<p>Assessment materials validly assess occupational competence and have been rigorously tested by occupational experts and reviewed as appropriate</p> <p>CPD and training exceeds usual expectations, including a proactive approach to learning and improvement</p>
Reliable	<p>Assessment is not undertaken independently of</p>	<p>Assessment is independent of</p>	<p>Effective standardisation and</p>	<p>Excellent Assessment practice observed</p>

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
	<p>employer or training provider</p> <p>Standardisation and moderation processes do not ensure quality and consistency</p> <p>Significant differences in the consistency of delivery or grading across different groups of apprentices</p>	<p>employer and training provider</p> <p>Standardisation and moderation are run effectively, but some elements require improvement</p> <p>Assessment is delivered comparably across different parts of the country or employers</p>	<p>moderation processes in place</p> <p>Steps are in place to ensure that all Assessment is delivered comparably and in line with EQA provider guidelines</p>	<p>throughout delivery that ensures Assessment is comparable across the Standard and over time</p> <p>A proactive approach is taken to ensure comparability with other EPAOs for the same Standard, where appropriate, or with similar standards</p>
Efficient	<p>EPAO fails to make adequate assessors available for the assessment required</p> <p>Administrative processes are ineffective or inefficient in a way which compromises apprentice or employer experience</p>	<p>Functional systems and processes are in place but could be improved</p>	<p>Efficient systems in place for allocating assessors and robust business continuity arrangements</p> <p>Procedures understood at all appropriate levels within the organisation with accountability and responsibility at the right level</p>	<p>A proactive approach includes forecasting and continuous improvement</p>
Positive	<p>There are risks to the security of Assessment materials</p> <p>Apprentices requiring reasonable adjustments are</p>	<p>EPAO effectively checks that gateway requirements are met but this is not always consistent</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments and special considerations are</p>	<p>EPAO consistently and effectively checks that gateway requirements are met</p> <p>Reasonable adjustments and special considerations are</p>	<p>Every effort made to ensure that apprentices and employers receive a positive experience of EPA</p> <p>Feedback indicates a consistently high level of satisfaction from employers</p>

	4. Inadequate	3. Requires improvement	2. Good	1. Outstanding
	<p>not appropriately provided for</p> <p>Support materials and other information (including on fees) are not available, or are inaccurate or inappropriate</p> <p>Feedback from employers and apprentices indicates a generally poor level of service</p>	<p>mostly administered fairly and effectively, and appropriately recorded</p> <p>Support materials are adequate but may not be standard specific or updated frequently</p> <p>Feedback indicates a reasonable level of satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p>	<p>always administered fairly, effectively, and are appropriately recorded</p> <p>All processes to support assessment delivery are effective</p> <p>Support materials are comprehensive and helpful</p> <p>Feedback indicates a mostly high level of satisfaction from employers and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p>	<p>and apprentices with the way the EPA was conducted</p> <p>A wide range of support is offered to employers and apprentices</p>
Learning	<p>No or limited efforts made to obtain feedback from apprentices, employers or training providers</p> <p>Continue to apply procedures and processes which have been demonstrated to be ineffective</p>	<p>Some effort made to obtain and act on feedback from employers, apprentices and training providers but may be ad hoc or unfocused</p>	<p>Robust systems in place to obtain and act on feedback from employers, apprentices and training providers</p> <p>Improvements made to assessment practice from review of internal quality assurance processes</p>	<p>Continuous improvement embedded into culture of the organisation at all levels</p> <p>Feedback sought from employers and apprentices is routinely used to improve assessment delivery</p>

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs check report for factual accuracy and develop action plan.

Ofqual/OfS produce information about apprenticeship standard and each EPAO assessing that standard.

The **Institute** oversees the EQA Framework, provides consolidated reports for EPAOs and looks holistically at the delivery of EQA and findings across all standards. The Institute's Quality Assurance Committee provides governance and oversight, makes recommendations and ensures that the Institute is meeting its statutory duties.

Delivering our principles

- **relevant** – Ofqual and OfS report good practice and areas of improvement for the EPAO to support continuous improvement to the quality of assessments
- **reliable** – Ofqual and OfS will take note of advice and any actions to ensure the quality of all EPAs; inadequate performance will be identified and Institute informed so interventions can be agreed and managed effectively
- **positive** – feedback includes examples of good practice and encourages a collaborative approach to improvement
- **efficient** – the Institute provides clear process guidance and a digital platform to allow for real time reporting and proactive planning
- **learning** – feedback and improvement is embedded into the monitoring process, ensuring all learning is acknowledged and acted upon

The process

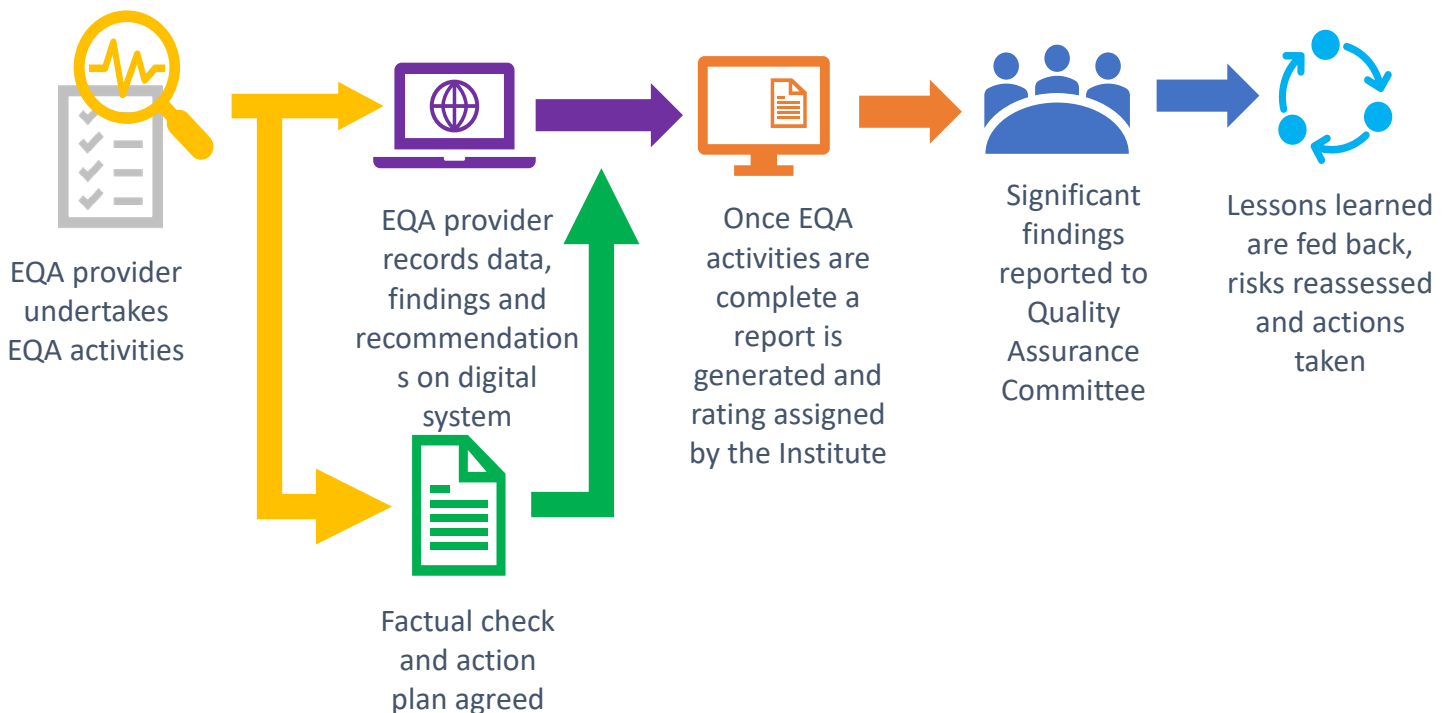


Figure 6 - EQA reporting process

6. Using EQA to improve assessment

Ensuring that all organisations within the apprenticeship assessment system learn from the findings of EQA and are able to make improvements as a result.

Why is this important?

The Institute's aim is to ensure the quality of apprenticeships and to do that it requires a system that aids continuous improvement. Feedback from the findings of EQA, including from the experiences of apprentices and employers, and from the EPAOs themselves, will enable all parts of the assessment system to learn from current practice and improve their delivery. This will allow ongoing improvements to EPA in real-time, and the Institute will also undertake longitudinal evaluation of EPA over a longer time scale to ensure that it is continuing to provide relevant and reliable assessment.

What do we do to ensure it?

The Institute reviews assessment plans regularly, thematically, and in response to policy changes. In addition, ongoing monitoring and feedback encourages continuous improvement across all aspects of end-point assessment and ensures that every assessment is rigorous and fair.

Making improvements to assessment plans

Assessment plans are subject to a thorough, employer-led development and approvals process as outlined in Section 1. However, there will be occasions when they need to be clarified or revised as identified by different stakeholders, including training providers, EPAOs or EQA providers. Issues usually fall into three categories of:

- **deliverability** – typically identified when EPAOs experience of planning or delivering assessment indicate that an EPA plan cannot be delivered as written, or that implementing it would lead to an unreliable or inaccurate assessment of occupational competence
- **clarity** – where assessment plan language is ambiguous or unclear, and could be open to misinterpretation
- **errors** – factual errors, or conflicting requirements in the assessment plan

The following table explains how different types of issue should be resolved, including roles and responsibilities. The appropriate course of action will depend on the nature and scale of the problem.

Scale of issue	Example	Who can make the decision	Communications / audit requirements
Minor adjustments: For individual learners or flexibilities as set out within the assessment plan	Reasonable adjustment/ special considerations Flexibilities that will not compromise reliability / independence (e.g. around logistics)	EPAOs	Requirement that the EPAO keep a record of their decision and reason for making it and that this and any appropriate evidence behind the decision is available to EQA at audit
Intermediate issues: Clarifications and interpretation	Interpretation of assessment plan. This could include addressing either a single minor change or multiple alterations within an assessment method to enable effective delivery. For example setting a common duration for an assessment where this is not covered within the plan	EQA provider	EQA provider must engage with and disseminate any change to all EPAOs on the standard and confirm that they have been implemented EQA provider must record actions and notify the Institute so that the assessment plan can be updated if required
Major issues: Fundamental changes within an assessment method to enable effective delivery	Change of assessment method; change of grade descriptors	Ad hoc revisions follow the identification of any issues. Whole route reviews are also conducted periodically	A new version of the assessment plan will be developed by the Trailblazer and then published by the Institute as soon as possible The EQA provider will be informed and will be responsible for communicating with all relevant stakeholders and assuring that directed changes have been implemented

Improvements in assessment

EQA reviews will identify both good practice and issues in the delivery of the EPA. This will generate a rich source of intelligence to guide improvements. Ofqual and OfS, supported by professional and employer-led bodies where appropriate, will make recommendations for improvements to EPAOs during the course of regular monitoring, drawing on their occupational and assessment expertise, and good practice observed across their EQA activity.

Ofqual and OfS will respond to ad hoc queries and requests for guidance from EPAOs. In addition Ofqual and OfS will periodically bring EPAOs together at forums to discuss and share good practice in assessment, including organised by standard or by route, and will include relevant professional or employer-led bodies. There may be some areas of support for EPAOs that are better delivered by the professional and employer-led bodies that work with them on a particular standard, or by the Institute.

The Institute will bring Ofqual, OfS and the professional and employer-led bodies involved in EQA together on a periodic basis to share intelligence and good practice. This will allow the Institute and other organisations involved in EQA to track trends across EPA provision

and identify where issues which could impact the successful delivery of EPA may be occurring and target subsequent EQA activity. This is covered in more detail in chapter 8.

In addition to Ofqual/OfS' standing practices, the Institute may instigate thematic reviews through the annual plan and/or commission urgent or ad hoc reviews.

It is also crucial that EQA continues to draw on feedback from employers and apprentices in order to provide assurance that each EPA is continuing to deliver a relevant, reliable and cost-effective test of occupational competence. EPAOs should seek feedback from employers whose apprentices have been through their EPA, and the apprentices themselves to give assurance that the assessment met their expectations and is relevant to the occupation in question. Ofqual/OfS should review this feedback as part of their work.

Over time the Institute will additionally undertake longitudinal evaluation of end-point assessment drawing from a range of employers and former apprentices to capture their view of the relevance and reliability of the assessment. This will serve two purposes: firstly getting employer feedback on the continued relevance of assessment as occupations develop and evolve, feeding into the Institute's statutory review process; secondly, taking a view from users about the impact of the apprenticeship on the performance of the apprentice and the business. As part of this work the Institute will use its panel of apprentices as a conduit for the voices of all apprentices enabling us to take a longitudinal view of the continued relevance of EPA to those undertaking it.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs will make minor adjustments to assessment plans and report them to Ofqual/OfS.

Ofqual and OfS will work with EPAOs to resolve issues and ensure that EPAOs deliver any recommendation made by EQA monitoring. Ofqual and OfS will work with EPAOs, one another and the Institute to support consistency and continuous improvement.

The **Institute** will ensure that assessment plans are amended and/or other issues identified by EQA, are resolved. The Institute will undertake longitudinal evaluation of the continuing relevance and benefit of EPA.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** –EPAOs are encouraged to suggest improvements to assessment plans to ensure they are valid
- **reliable** – regular forums are held by Ofqual and OfS for EPAOs to share lessons learnt and to provide feedback. This ensures the approach is consistent and robust
- **positive** – feedback is welcomed on all aspects of EPA; all actors are committed listening to feedback and taking appropriate action

- **efficient** – feedback processes are clear, unambiguous and followed by all, so the right activity is done by the right people at the right time. That action is taken is proactively monitored
- **learning** – continuous improvement is built into every part of the EQA Framework and open and honest feedback is encouraged. Feedback will be sought from employers and apprentices, that the EPA is relevant to their occupation

The process

Minor and intermediate issues

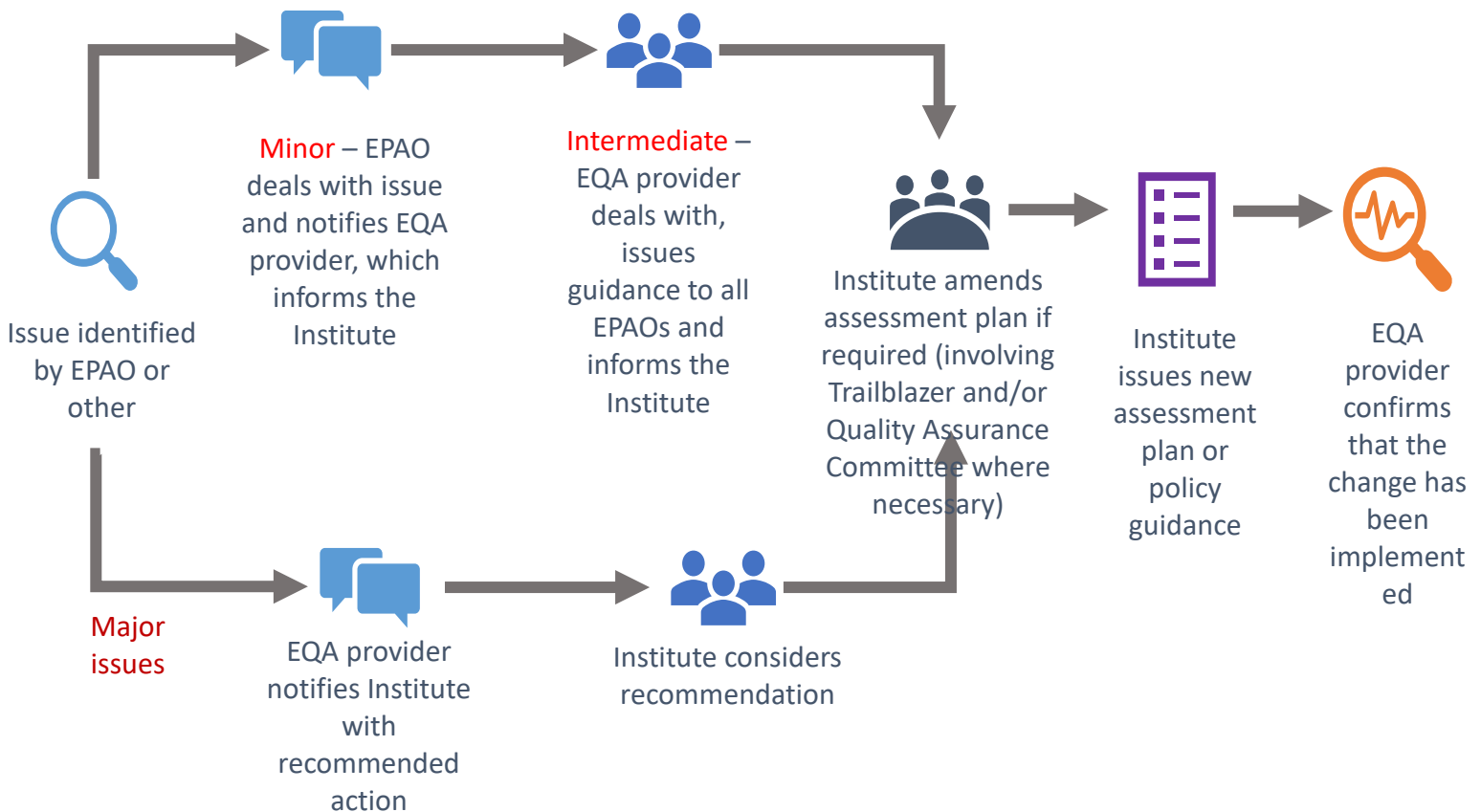


Figure 7 - Assessment plan feedback and improvement process

7. Taking regulatory action

Ensuring problems affecting EPAs are remedied as quickly and effectively as possible so that any risk to the quality of assessment is minimised, encompassing statutory regulatory action and enforcement.

Why is this important?

The EQA process will drive continuous improvement across the EPA system. Nevertheless, there will be occasions when issues with EPA arise, either because of the assessment plans themselves or through the interpretation and delivery of assessment by EPAOs. In these circumstances, it is imperative that Ofqual, OfS, ESFA and the Institute act quickly, fairly and robustly and in a coordinated fashion to protect the interests of apprentices, employers and the apprenticeship system.

What is done to assure EPA?

Through the methods outlined previously in this framework, Ofqual/OfS will monitor the quality of apprenticeship assessment. This regular process may identify issues that compromise the delivery of EPA. In addition, evidence of EPAOs compromising effective delivery of assessment may come from a variety of sources, including:

- self-reporting of issues by EPAOs in accordance with the conditions of the RoEPAO, General Conditions of Recognition (Ofqual) or Conditions of Registration (OfS)
- analysis of data
- issues unearthed in other areas of regulatory activity
- complaints from apprentices, training providers or employers
- complaints from employees of EPAOs
- regulatory investigation on the basis of data analysis
- or other relevant intelligence

Examples of issues which could compromise the effective delivery of assessment include:

- an EPAO unable to deliver assessment at the time, and in the manner agreed with an employer in accordance with the published assessment plan.
- EPAO not employing appropriately qualified or trained personnel, including those who are required to have occupational experience and awareness
- an error in assessment materials which could compromise the relevance or reliability of the assessment
- a breach in confidentiality or security of assessment materials
- an EPAO conducting assessment in such a way that any apprentice may not be assessed accurately, fairly or consistently with other apprentices on the same standard and in accordance with the same assessment plan
- any other risk to the independence of the assessment

When Ofqual/OfS is made aware or otherwise considers that an issue has occurred, or may occur, that has or could compromise assessment delivery they will consider a response that is proportionate to the risk, taking into account a number of factors. In most cases statutory regulatory action may not be necessary. Ofqual/OfS will work with the EPAO to ensure that it has a programme of proportionate actions to resolve the issue as quickly as possible and this may be discussed beforehand with the Institute, depending on the severity and potential impact of the action envisaged. Ofqual/OfS will alert the Institute when they consider an incident is likely to require statutory regulatory action and will do so before commencing any formal process for taking any such action. The Institute may provide advice to Ofqual/OfS' operational teams on the potential for alternatives to statutory regulatory action. In some instances, it may be appropriate for the Institute to take action, and this will be agreed between Ofqual/OfS and the Institute. In particular, the Institute has statutory power under the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to carry out a review and can make arrangements in order for such a review to take place to gain further understanding of the issue. In some instances the appropriate action may be through exercise of the contractual levers which the ESFA has over EPAOs through their funding of them; up to and including removal from the RoEPAO.

Where Ofqual/OfS decides, taking into account consultation with the Institute, to commence its formal process, decisions whether or not to take statutory regulatory action, and as to the nature and scope of any such action, will be made by that regulator. Ofqual/OfS will follow their established and published policies and will notify the Institute of any decisions they take concerning statutory regulatory action.

The Institute, Ofqual and OfS will discuss lessons learnt from enforcement activities generally, to consider how those activities might contribute to continuous improvement and will collaborate as appropriate in the development of enforcement strategies to promote consistency across the sector. The Institute's Quality Assurance Committee will maintain oversight of relevant regulatory activity and may ask for further information in relation to decided cases and provide advice to inform future cases.

Examples of regulatory action that may be taken to tackle EPA issues include:

- impose additional rules on an EPAO to deal with specific issues
- require EPAOs to do things or stop doing things, to bring them into compliance
- impose financial penalties in proportionate circumstances, such as serious breaches that affect the standard of the EPA or public confidence
- withdraw an EPAO's regulated status for some or all of its EPAs as necessary, preventing it from undertaking and awarding EPAs against an Apprenticeship Standard

If regulatory action is taken, a decision may be published in accordance with Ofqual/OfS' policy to support the prevention of similar incidents in the future.

Some standards and assessment plans are subject to other regulatory regimes, or linked to the achievement of a professional standard or licence to practice. If the EPAO is subject to a parallel regime, and has transgressed the requirements of that regime, the Institute and regulators will work together to determine an appropriate and proportionate course of action.

Which organisations are involved?

EPAOs are required to inform Ofqual/OfS if they have breached relevant conditions.

Ofqual and OfS will monitor the quality of apprenticeship assessment delivery, rectify issues and take regulatory or enforcement action where appropriate

The **Institute** will act quickly, fairly and robustly to review issues, liaise with appropriate bodies and recommend a course of action. As part of its oversight role, the Institute's Quality Assurance Committee will be informed of all issues undergoing investigation and may discuss courses of action with Ofqual/OfS.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – action taken in response to issues will be swift, proportionate and based on evidence
- **reliable** – the same process is followed by all and outcomes and actions are comparable.
- **positive** – issues will be resolved quickly and effectively in order to maintain the quality of apprenticeships for employers and apprentices
- **efficient** – a clear escalation process ensures that activities and decisions take place at the right level at the right time, and only the most serious issues are passed up the line
- **learning** – where issues are found, we learn from them and respond by making improvements throughout the system

The process

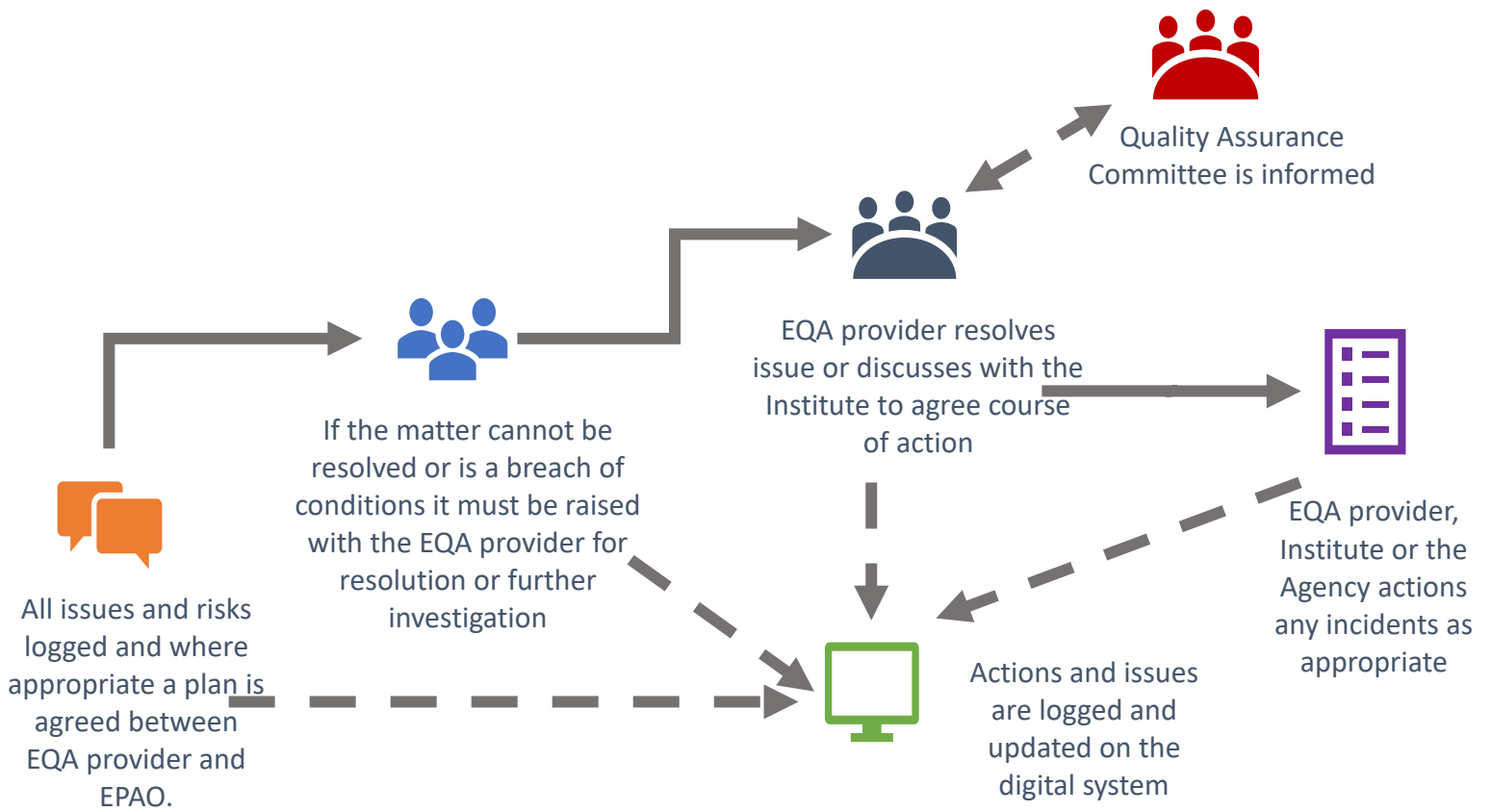


Figure 8 - Taking action

8. Continuous Improvement of EQA process

Ensuring that we continue to monitor the delivery of EQA and are able to make improvements as a result.

Why is this important?

As the number of assessments continues to grow, it is imperative that we continue to monitor the impact of and improve EQA. It is also essential to collect feedback from Ofqual, OfS and those professional and employer-led bodies supporting them; and EPAOs who have experienced EQA in order to understand:

- what additional guidance or support is needed for those designing apprenticeships, delivering assessment or providing EQA
- whether EQA is improving the quality and delivery of EPA and providing assurance for employers and apprentices
- whether responsibilities, timelines and priorities remain appropriate
- that the cost associated with EQA are appropriate and that the system is operating efficiently and effectively
- how EQA drives behaviours
- how the interaction between Ofqual/OfS and the professional and employer-led bodies they work with is operating

What do we do to ensure it?

The Institute will review at least annually, EQA processes as set out in the EQA Framework, in conjunction with Ofqual/OfS, to ensure they remain relevant. Officials from the Institute will work with Ofqual/OfS to support planning and activities, and ensure that EQA operates effectively, including through effective sharing of data through the Institute's digital system in accordance with the Institute's needs.

Included in the reviews will be any issues that the JMC deems it necessary to raise as result of its risk assessment work.

Assurance of EQA providers

The Institute is responsible for ensuring that Ofqual/OfS are undertaking evaluations of the quality of assessment in accordance with the Institute's statutory responsibilities.

The Institute will provide advice and guidance on EQA delivery as appropriate and will also establish a formal annual reporting schedule between the Institute and each of Ofqual and OfS. This will include:

- annual meetings between CEOs or nominated representatives to agree future priorities and review delivery to date

- quarterly review of performance
- quarterly reporting to the Institute's Quality Assurance Committee on the findings of EQA
- monthly operational progress review

These meetings will include monitoring progress against the agreed annual plan of activity, regular catch-ups, analysis of the data entered onto the digital system, and analysis of the annual report EQA providers are required to submit to the Institute.

Periodically, the Institute may invite independent bodies, such as Government Internal Audit, to review the functioning of EQA.

Which organisations are involved?

EQA providers and EPAOs will provide the Institute with feedback on the operation of the EQA Framework, including identifying potential improvements.

The **Institute** will support Ofqual/OfS to deliver EQA in order to drive up the quality of apprenticeship assessment. The Institute will also consult other stakeholders to ascertain their views of the effectiveness of EQA and organise periodic, independent, reviews of the EQA system.

Delivering against our principles

- **relevant** – Ofqual/OfS and other stakeholders are encouraged to recommend improvements to the delivery of EQA including the EQA Framework
- **reliable** – effective relationships between the Institute and Ofqual/OfS will ensure that issues are resolved and learning is captured, allowing assurance to employers and apprentices. Independent audits of EQA will be conducted periodically
- **positive** – the Institute is committed to listening to all feedback and taking appropriate action. Good practice will be shared with Ofqual/OfS
- **efficient** – the Framework has been introduced to make the delivery of EQA more efficient and effective. The Institute will review its operation to ensure that it continues to do so
- **learning** – continuous improvement is built into every part of the Framework and open and honest feedback is encouraged

Annex 1: The role of professional and employer-led bodies

Process

When the trailblazer group develops a standard and end-point assessment plan they will be asked whether there is a professional body in their sector that should be involved in the EQA of assessment in this occupation.

Where the trailblazer group identifies an appropriate professional or employer-led body then Ofqual/OfS will work with them to add to the richness of the work they do and provide an employer's perspective.

Ofqual and OfS will dock into this expertise wherever they need the specialist support including but not limited to activities such as technical evaluation of materials, monitoring visits and observations of live assessment. The professional or employer-led body will feed its expertise into Ofqual/OfS reporting and may also feed back into the Institute and the trailblazer as the continuing relevance and reliability of the assessment in determining occupational competence.

For the purposes of ensuring that the bodies able to work with Ofqual and OfS are reflective of the wide variety of employer, professional and technical organisations with an interest in apprenticeships quality, the Institute is proposing that these bodies could include:

- Organisations regulating entry to, and exit from, a particular profession
- Trade associations made up (and funded by) members who are employers in a given sector
- Chartered Institutes, whose members are individual professionals in a given sector
- Guilds or livery companies
- Organisations with an established industry levy
- Intermediary bodies, widely recognised to represent a given sector, with a focus on supporting skills development
- Professional membership bodies widely recognised as setting standards for that profession

Where no appropriate professional or employer-led body exists all aspects of EQA will be undertaken by Ofqual or OfS in line with this framework.

However, where a professional or employer-led body is identified by the Trailblazer, the Institute will undertake due diligence to confirm that this organisation is an appropriate body to undertake this role in EQA. This will include confirming:

- that the nominated organisation genuinely represents employers from across their sector/profession/trade
- their capability and capacity to undertake the role
- that they have no conflicts of interest that would prevent them from acting impartially in EQA

The Institute's Quality Assurance Committee will approve organisations that meet these criteria and the Institute will publish and maintain a Register of Professional/Employer-led Bodies on its website.

The role of professional and employer-led bodies

Ofqual or OfS will agree a schedule of EQA activity for each year with the Institute, alongside the necessary resource allocation. As part of this they will agree the usage of professional bodies across all standards.

For standards where a professional body or employer group is named on the Institute's website, Ofqual or OfS will work with them to ensure that their view on the assessment is included in EQA. This will encompass:

- Advice to the Institute during the Assessment Plan approval (final approval is by the Institute)
- Scrutiny of the assessment and support materials produced by the EPAO, including as part of readiness checks, before an EPAO can deliver a new standard, to ensure that they meet the needs of the sector
- Insight and intelligence to support prioritisation and targeting of EQA activities
- Operational input, to confirm that quality assessment continues to deliver occupational competence
- Continuous feedback and improvement to processes
- providing support to EPAOs to help them improve EPA delivery where EQA activity identifies specific actions that are required to help an EPAO to improve, or identifies a general trend in EPA delivery that is best addressed collectively by all EPAOs operating across a standard or group of standards

In addition Ofqual or OfS may call on the registered professional or employer-led body for additional work as required – for example, if Ofqual or OfS wish to undertake thematic reviews.