

Coronavirus (COVID-19) and Ofqual regulated Apprenticeship End Point Assessments (EPAs)

With the developing situation regarding Coronavirus and the potential resulting impact over the coming weeks and months, we know that that you, as End-point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs), will be experiencing problems with the delivery of your End-point Assessments (EPAs).

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education has issued guidance <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/response-to-covid-19/> to all EPAOs which you should read alongside this guidance.

We have set out this additional guidance for EPAOs who are Ofqual regulated and where Ofqual is the External Quality Assurance Provider for the relevant Apprenticeship standard. We explain how you should work with us and when and how you can apply the professional discretion that the Institute's guidance sets out.

Overall approach

EPA assessment plans may have requirements around the context, location, timing, order and personnel associated which you have to follow. We recognise that meeting all of these will become increasingly challenging as a result of ongoing disruption resulting from the outbreak of Coronavirus.

As a starting point, every effort should be made to ensure apprentices continue to be assessed in accordance with the current EPA plan and the Ofqual Conditions of Recognition and related requirements. When faced with disruption affecting completion of the EPA, EPAOs should reschedule the assessment(s) wherever possible.

The Institute's guidance recognises that there may be instances where rescheduling the assessment(s) may not be possible. Some discretion is therefore permitted so that individuals are protected and disruption is minimised, whilst safeguarding the quality and validity of apprenticeships, should there be good reason for not extending the apprenticeship. In these instances, you may consider adapting your approach to the assessment(s) in line with this overriding principle, and within the scope of the guidance issued by the Institute.

Any adaptations that you want to make must still ensure fairness for apprentices and must remain a valid assessment of occupational competence. These arrangements relate to the response to Coronavirus and are temporary.

Rescheduling of assessments

In most cases, given the need to ensure occupational competence, we expect you to reschedule assessments to avoid disadvantaging the apprentices. This is especially the case if the timing of the assessments and/or the relevant Assessment Plans allow such flexibility. You should have an appropriate strategy that enables you to assess, plan for, and monitor the scale and impact of any rescheduling that is required which includes a log of any Coronavirus related actions. You should keep this up to date and make it available for review by us should we ask to see it.

You do not need to notify us in relation to decisions to delay or reschedule EPAs unless that results in an Adverse Effect. We will however monitor the impacts of delays to delivery at a system level and may contact you directly to discuss.

You should consider the risks to assessment validity and fairness if rescheduling the assessments requires you to deviate from the relevant Assessment Plans, for example, in relation to timescales or sequencing of assessments.

Adapting assessments

You should keep the impact of rescheduling or delaying the assessments under review. If as part of that review, you identify that rescheduling could cause hardship to the apprentices, the Institute's guidance gives discretion to adapt the assessments. However, the permitted adaptations may not always be appropriate depending on the context and on whether your systems and processes can accommodate any changes safely. As a result some adaptations may create risk of non-compliance with our Conditions of recognition and related requirements.

Examples of hardship to apprentices arising from rescheduling or delay would be likely to be linked to a negative impact given the apprentice's individual circumstances or where delay puts apprentices at risk of not being able to complete their apprenticeship at a later date.

You should only consider adaptations within the scope of the guidance issued by the Institute. Where you are considering an adaptation, you must consider the full range of risks to ensure that the proposed adaptation does not cause unfairness to apprentices and does not lead to invalid assessment outcomes. The range of factors is likely to vary across different Standards, assessment requirements and your existing or forecast operational capability and capacity.

If you consider that the adaptations need to depart from the stipulations of the Assessment Plans, you must notify us in advance and without delay, so that we can consider your proposed changes.

EPAOs should do this via the usual Event Notification process, flagging that the qualification in question is an EPA and the relevant part of the Institute's guidance that is engaged. You must have agreement from us before implementing any adaptation. Please provide as much information as you can about your proposed approach and how you will manage any risks arising from the adaptation. We will track all requests and will keep our guidance up to date to help expedite resolution of

more straightforward issues. We will also update our guidance should we consider that any specific adaptations do not need to be notified to or agreed by us.

Where rescheduling gives rise to Adverse Effects (including those resulting from hardship to apprentices), and you consider adaptations or other mitigations should be made, then you should notify that to us. You should provide an explanation of the issue and details of your proposed solution. We will consider whether that can be agreed based on the specific context and we will engage with the Institute in relation to these on a case by case basis.

We are committed to being pragmatic, proportionate and timely in our responses. Priority should always be given to putting in place the right solutions to protect fairness and allow apprentices to demonstrate occupational competence, and we recognise that you may need to make compromises and changes to normal operating procedures to achieve that.