

Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy- Assessment Design and Delivery

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Overview

The Equality and Diversity- Assessment Design and Delivery policy has been developed to ensure that Professional Assessment Limited, (PAL) meets its responsibilities in regard to an open, equitable and fair end-point assessment.

PAL recognises that a commitment to Equality and Diversity is a commitment to an on-going review of policies, practice and performance which is predicated on the principles of fair, accessible, and reliable assessment. PAL aims to monitor, review, and evaluate its performance against the policy through its review of end-point assessment outcomes, stakeholder feedback, to include monitoring the enquiries, appeals and complaints, to identify where our working practices are perceived or experienced as being in contravention of this policy and good EDI practices.

The policy draws on guidance provided for regulatory qualifications, as the principles enshrined in this guidance are equally valid for EPAOs and independent assessment activities. To this end, regarding end-point assessment design we have endeavored to guarantee the assessment instruments are fair and equal to ensure that wherever possible all apprentices with the relevant skills, knowledge and behaviours can have their achievement recognised.

Policy Scope

PAL is committed to encouraging equality and diversity among our workforce and eliminating unlawful discrimination across all of our activities.

The aim is for our workforce to be truly supportive of all sections of society and our customers, and for each employee to feel respected and able to give their best. PAL, in providing goods and/or services and/or facilities - is also committed against unlawful discrimination of customers or the public.

All Apprentices (learners) should have equal opportunity to access our assessments, related products and services and the content of our assessments should reflect the wide diversity of our audiences.

The aim of the policy is that the end-point assessment systems and our code of conduct for all PAL personnel demonstrate a fair and equitable assessment offer, which provides every opportunity for an apprentice to be successful in their end-point assessment and thereby achieve their apprenticeship certificate. All PAL personnel are committed to the enactment of this policy.

This policy works alongside PAL's First Access Policy. PAL also has an Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Statement and an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Policy for Personnel.

Who is this policy for?

This policy is intended for all:

- PAL employees
- PAL associates, consultants/technical advisors
- PAL Advisory Group Members
- Third parties
- PAL clients (Employers, Providers, Apprentices)

This policy applies to:

- All EPA work across all standards
- All audit and compliance activities

Purpose

We want to ensure that people with diverse characteristics and backgrounds consider PAL to be their end-point assessment organisation of choice. We want everyone who engages with PAL's products and services to reach their full potential; in a manner which is respectful and that accepts individual difference.

This policy demonstrates how PAL celebrates and values the diversity of its apprentices, employers, and providers who we provide services for, and how through our end-point assessment practices we want them to be able to demonstrate their full potential against the apprenticeship standards they are signed up to. Likewise, we want all PAL personnel to feel they are respected and are able to contribute to the PAL business in a way that is mutually beneficial.

PAL is opposed to discrimination on any grounds, including those of race, language, colour, nationality, ethnicity, regional or national origin, gender, rurality, sexual orientation, marital status, age, religious belief, disability, or social background.

Commitment

PAL commits to:

- Encourage equality and diversity in the workplace as it is good practice and make business sense.
- Create a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all personnel are recognised and valued.
 - This commitment includes training and or/ providing information and guidance within our CPD library which is available to employees, associates, and consultants/technical advisors and along with this policy it informs individuals about their rights and responsibilities under the equality policy. Responsibilities include personnel (includes associates and consultants/technical advisors/Advisory Group Members) conducting themselves to help the organisation provide equal opportunities in employment, and prevent bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination.
 - All personnel should understand they, as well as the organisation, can be held liable for acts of bullying, harassment, victimisation, and unlawful discrimination, in the course of their employment, against fellow employees, customers, suppliers and the public.
- Take seriously complaints of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination by fellow employees, customers, suppliers, visitors, the public, and any others during the organisation's work activities.
 - Such acts will be dealt with as misconduct under the organisation's grievance and/or disciplinary procedures, and any appropriate action will be taken. Particularly serious complaints could amount to gross misconduct and lead to dismissal without notice.
 - Further, sexual harassment may amount to both an employment rights matter and a criminal matter, such as in sexual assault allegations. In addition, harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 – which is not limited to circumstances where harassment relates to a protected characteristic – is a criminal offence.
- Make opportunities for training, development, and progress available to all personnel, who will be helped and encouraged to develop their full potential, so their talents and resources can be fully utilised to maximise the efficiency of the organisation, the business and the service PAL provides.
- Decisions concerning staff being based on merit (apart from in any necessary and limited exemptions and exceptions allowed under the Equality Act).
- Review employment practices and procedures when necessary to ensure fairness and update them and the policy to take account of changes in the law.
- Monitor the make-up of the workforce regarding information such as age, gender, ethnic background, sexual orientation, religion or belief, and disability in encouraging equality and diversity, and in meeting the aims and commitments set out in the equality policy.
- Conducting our business in a professional, respectful fashion, to include handling sensitive information in a secure fashion and treating all stakeholders with dignity.

Process

PAL will ensure that equality of opportunity is promoted in access to our products and services and that unfair or unlawful discrimination, whether direct or indirect, is eliminated. This policy is supported by a range of PAL policies as detailed below:

- Access to equality of opportunity in assessment is expressed within the assessment administration and development of resources policy
- PAL's appeals and enquiries policy and complaints policy is accessible and available to all relevant stakeholders, and no individual or a particular group is restricted from challenging an assessment decision or making a justified complaint against the company

- PAL's information sources, guides and service level contracts available detail roles and responsibilities of all parties in Apprenticeship delivery and makes clear requirements and is made available to all customers
- Information regarding the application of reasonable adjustments will be recorded, monitored, and used to inform future developments
- The language used in all materials will be clear, free from bias and appropriate to the target group

PAL personnel and associates have access to training materials to identify issues relating to equality and diversity, especially in the application of assessment. All products and services are reviewed against this policy.

As an EPAO, PAL has service level contracts with training providers who act on behalf of their employer contacts. PAL will, where reasonably practical and within the confines of our service level contracts, ensure that all parties we offer an EPA service for have in place the following:

- An effective equality and diversity policy, with which apprentices and associated personnel of training organisations and employers are familiar and which is applied to the entirety of the apprenticeship programme
- A commitment and policy that ensures they adhere to relevant legislation regarding equality and diversity
- A programme delivery model that supports accessible provision and provides fair and reliable training and formative assessment.

Employers, Providers, Apprentices and Third Parties and Centres

PAL expects its clients (employers and providers) to enable Apprentices (learners) to have equal access to training and assessment, irrespective of their sex, sexual orientation, marital status, age, religion, race, nationality, ethnic origin, or disability. Clients are required to have a policy to ensure that such discrimination does not occur either directly, indirectly or because of pressure from other bodies. This policy should apply to all assessment/employment/training sites and there should be arrangements in place to monitor its application and effectiveness.

Apprentices (learners) are expected to comply with relevant equalities legislation and meet the respective apprenticeship standard requirements that are informed by equality, diversity, and inclusion practices.

PAL expects all third parties we work with to comply with the Equality Act.

Qualification (Standard) Development



Design and development of our assessments of standards

The process of designing of assessments will include identifying and precluding any unjustifiable barriers in the assessment of apprenticeship standards that might prevent Apprentices (learners) who share particular protected characteristics from demonstrating their knowledge, skills, and behaviours, commensurate with the apprenticeship standard and assessment plan they are enrolled on. This includes Apprentices with physical disabilities.

We are committed to:

- Developing assessment resources that are accessible to, and representative of, the Apprentices taking them, where these are not restricted by external determined conditions
- Developing assessments which are free from bias and do not discriminate against specific groups or characteristics
- Making sure our assessments and related resources are of the appropriate caliber and that our stakeholders regard them as a reliable determinant of competence
- Designing assessment instruments that accurately assess the requisite knowledge, skills and behaviours of a named standard that provide accurate, evaluative, and reliable assessment grades and outcomes.
- Designing assessment instruments that meet the standard 'level' requirements and encourage the apprentice to progress

We will continue to develop our relationships with employers and providers and develop our online materials, to improve access for all apprentices with learning difficulties and or disabilities, as recognised through the PAL Reasonable Adjustments and Special Considerations policy and Reasonable Adjustments guidance document.

By doing these things we ensure Apprentices with a protected characteristic, when they are undertaking one of our assessments, are neither advantaged nor disadvantaged in comparison to Apprentices (learners) who do not share that characteristic.

We monitor and review equality and diversity throughout the development of assessments and resource materials, by talking to occupational experts, end-users and professional associations, and employers, to ensure our materials are fit for purpose and our assessors are equipped to deliver assessments, in line with the respective assessment plan requirements.

Engaging and contracting with Employers and Providers

PAL will:

- Ensure publicity and employer and provider engagement procedures will be designed to encourage relationships from all sections of the community and from all levels of ability and will be available in a range of formats upon request
- Ensure that engagement with both employers and providers is user friendly and avoids unnecessary barriers to access for intended apprentices
- Continue to respond to individual assessment needs and in specific cases, requests for reasonable adjustments.
- Make clear our expectations and commitments to equality and diversity in our marketing materials and engagement activities

We make available to all of Apprentices, Employers and Providers our essential policies, so they are appraised of how to appeal or enquire about an assessment decision, make a complaint, and how to inform PAL of special considerations and request reasonable adjustments.

We are always looking to improve the accessibility of our customer-facing IT systems and provide guides and 1:1 support to help all stakeholders obtain the information they require. Additionally, we provide all our stakeholders

with up-to-date information regarding assessments, such as changes to assessment plans or the introduction of assessment flexibilities.

Our assessment materials are housed on Padlets that can be embedded into our partners learning management system (LMS) platforms; saved as PDFs; accessed by links, sent directly to stakeholders, or accessed via epaPRO or accessed via a QR code.

Delivery and assessment of standards we are approved to assess

We aim to provide equality of opportunity for apprentices to access all our assessments and offer remote and on-site assessments, in accordance with assessment plan guidance, regulatory guidance and assessment discretions and any external factors that can require us to adapt our offer.

PAL is committed to ensuring that assessment environments are welcoming and safe for all and we expect the conduct of PAL personnel to fully support this aim, through appropriate professional and inclusive behaviour and conduct. PAL has a duty to ensure that the integrity of all assessment products and materials, including end-point assessments, is always maintained. At the same time, PAL and its providers and employers have a duty to ensure individual Apprentices have access to apprenticeship standards and assessments that are most appropriate for their individual needs.

The EPA delivery team, PAL's quality assurance team and the resource (qualification) development teams will ensure that assessments, support material, and delivery methods, are free from bias and avoid stereotyping and discrimination. PAL's assessors will encourage apprentices to explore equality and diversity issues where required and in line with apprenticeship standards assessment plans.

Reasonable adjustments and special consideration

We are committed to fulfilling our duty to meet the access arrangements requested for our apprentices in a way that does not disadvantage them or their peers.

We will always consider a request relating access to our assessments, except where acceptance of the request is not logistically possible, or where it would undermine the assessment criteria.

Further information is available in PAL's Special Consideration and Reasonable Adjustment Policy.

Language Modification

PAL's assessments are written using only level appropriate language and terms, in plain English and using standard English Grammar. Our Use of Language guidance document establishes the principle that for example colloquialisms and idioms must be avoided, along with the exclusion of any terms which may be unfamiliar to an apprentice at the respective level. Any sector specific technical terms are only used where appropriate and necessary, and in line with the expected level of understanding at an appropriate level.

Should a Language Modification of an assessment be found to be required, either considering an internal review or following a request from an apprentice or employer, then the services of British Association of Teachers of Deaf Children or Young People (BATOD) will be sought, and a request send to langmod@batod.org.uk. The team at BATOD have vast experience in reviewing examination papers and moderating the language as necessary.

ReadSpeaker

We offer a Text to Speech solution as an add-on called ReadSpeaker for our onscreen tests.

ReadSpeaker text-to-speech software provides on our assessment platform improved digital accessibility to learners with learning and speech disabilities, visual impairments, and low literacy challenges. ReadSpeaker ensures assessment items are clear and comprehensible to all learners. Text-to-speech eases the assessment experience for learners who have dyslexia. It also helps people with learning disabilities by removing the stress of reading and presenting information in an optimal format.

Reading aloud can be done automatically or by manually highlighting text and is enabled for those learners who need this. ReadSpeaker is a text to speech solution which makes it possible to have content read aloud to learners. If a learner has ReadSpeaker enabled, the ReadSpeaker button will appear on the top left next to the logo. Clicking on the play button will start reading the text on the page aloud and is implemented in for all question types. ReadSpeaker will also read the welcome and the finish page and dashboard.

Request for certification

We believe that all Apprentices should achieve the recognition they deserve from successfully completing their end-point assessment, as stipulated by the relevant assessment plan and that this achievement can be fairly compared to the achievement of their peers. To provide every opportunity, PAL fully involves apprentices in an assessment planning process and always makes available the full range of assessment options and supports any assessment flexibilities, or amendments, approved by external agencies, to facilitate both access and attainment.

Monitoring the success and relevance of our arrangements

PAL is committed to complying with all current and relevant legislation. As part of the Apprentice registration and certification request processes for end-point assessment, PAL may collect information on diversity, requests for special considerations, access arrangements and feedback from Apprentices, Employers, Providers, and other stakeholders.

All relevant issues identified that suggest that PAL provision or services may have unnecessarily impacted on Apprentices will be reported back to the PAL Directors'. They are responsible for introducing, as appropriate, amendments to provision and/or services where necessary and in accordance with PAL procedures for developing and reviewing apprenticeship standards. All policies are regularly reviewed for compliance and suitability.

Review Arrangements

We will review the policy annually and revise it as and when necessary, in response to feedback or requests. We may also update this policy as part of good practice guidance issued by the regulatory authorities (e.g., to align with any processes established by the regulatory authorities such as Ofqual).

Regulatory references

PAL is required to establish and maintain compliance with regulatory conditions and criteria. This policy relates to Ofqual General Conditions of Recognition: Suitability for continuing recognition, A1; Arrangements with centres, C2; Accessibility of Qualifications D2; Ensuring assessment is fit for purpose and can be delivered E4; Arrangements for reasonable adjustments G6 and arrangements for Special consideration G7.

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Last Review: 14/09/2023

Next Review: 14/09/2024

Persons Responsible for review: Paul Kelly, Qualifications Director

This Policy has been agreed by Linda Martin, Managing Director

Useful additional information

<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/equality-and-human-rights-commission>

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/section/53>