

Withdrawal of Standards (Qualifications) Procedure by Professional Assessment Ltd

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Overview

There are times where either business, economic, legislation or government policy reviews means that Professional Assessment Limited (PAL) offering an EPA service for a specific standard becomes non-viable.

PAL has a duty to ensure that its actions does not prevent an apprentice from gaining recognition of their learning and acquiring their apprenticeship certificate at the due time. Ofqual as the regulator for the apprenticeship standards as delivered by PAL and the funding body the ESFA require end-point assessment organisations to specify how they will withdraw from a standard, without adversely impacting on the stakeholders involved in such a decision.

Policy and Procedure Scope

This policy and procedure details when, why and how the PAL Board would make the decision to withdraw from an apprenticeship standard.

In most cases such a step back from an apprenticeship standard will be a business-based decision of demand and affordability, as opposed to withdrawing from an apprenticeship standard as a result of sanctions.

Who is this policy and procedure for?

This procedure is for PAL personnel involved in a de-registration or withdrawal from an apprenticeship standard. The procedure is also information for our stakeholders indicating where PAL makes the decision to cease offering the standard, what we will do to ensure the protection of any invested stakeholders and registered apprentices, or apprentices in EPA is protected.

Purpose

This procedure has been designed to protect the interests of Apprentices (learners) in the event of Professional Assessment Ltd (PAL) withdrawing a standard (qualification) from its assessment offer, either voluntary or upon the instruction of any relevant regulatory body.

The procedure conforms to the ESFA conditions for being on the end-point assessment register and complies with the relevant Ofqual regulatory conditions.

Ofqual Condition D6.1

The conditions note that an awarding organisation/EPAO withdraws a qualification at the point in time when it first-

- 1(a) ceases to register Learners for the qualification,
- 2(b) ceases to deliver or award that qualification to learners,
- 3 (c) surrenders its recognition in respect of that qualification, or
- 4 (d) has its recognition withdrawn by Ofqual in respect of that qualification.

In all cases PAL will work with the appropriate agencies, regulatory bodies and our providers, employers, and apprentices to effect an orderly withdrawal

Reasons for voluntary withdrawal of standards (qualifications)

On the occasion, PAL may decide to withdraw a standard from its assessment offer. This would normally be for one of the following reasons:

- Lack of industry demand for the apprenticeship standard
- Lack of apprenticeship registrations
- Change in the skills required by the industry leading to an apprenticeship standard (qualification) not being fit for purpose

Withdrawal Procedure

a) **The decision to withdraw an apprenticeship standard will be made by the PAL Board of Directors.** This decision will be made after consultation with the relevant stakeholders, such as the Education Skills Funding Agency (ESFA), Ofqual, IfATE, and Trailblazer groups if and where appropriate. PAL would as a matter of priority consult with Providers and employers working with PAL and discuss and agree any arrangements regarding how such information is communicated to affected apprentices.

b) **PAL will take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of apprentices (learners) in relation to a standard it withdraws. Existing apprentices will be able to complete an apprenticeship standard for which they have registered or will be given a reasonable amount of notice to complete their assessment. Transition arrangements, along with a list of alternative EPAOs will be published and provided to apprentices, providers, and employers, of an apprenticeship standard that is to be withdrawn.**

c) PAL will give reasonable notice to the relevant regulatory bodies for its intention to withdraw an apprenticeship standard and will inform the relevant regulators of its intention prior to providing the information to apprentices, providers, and employers.

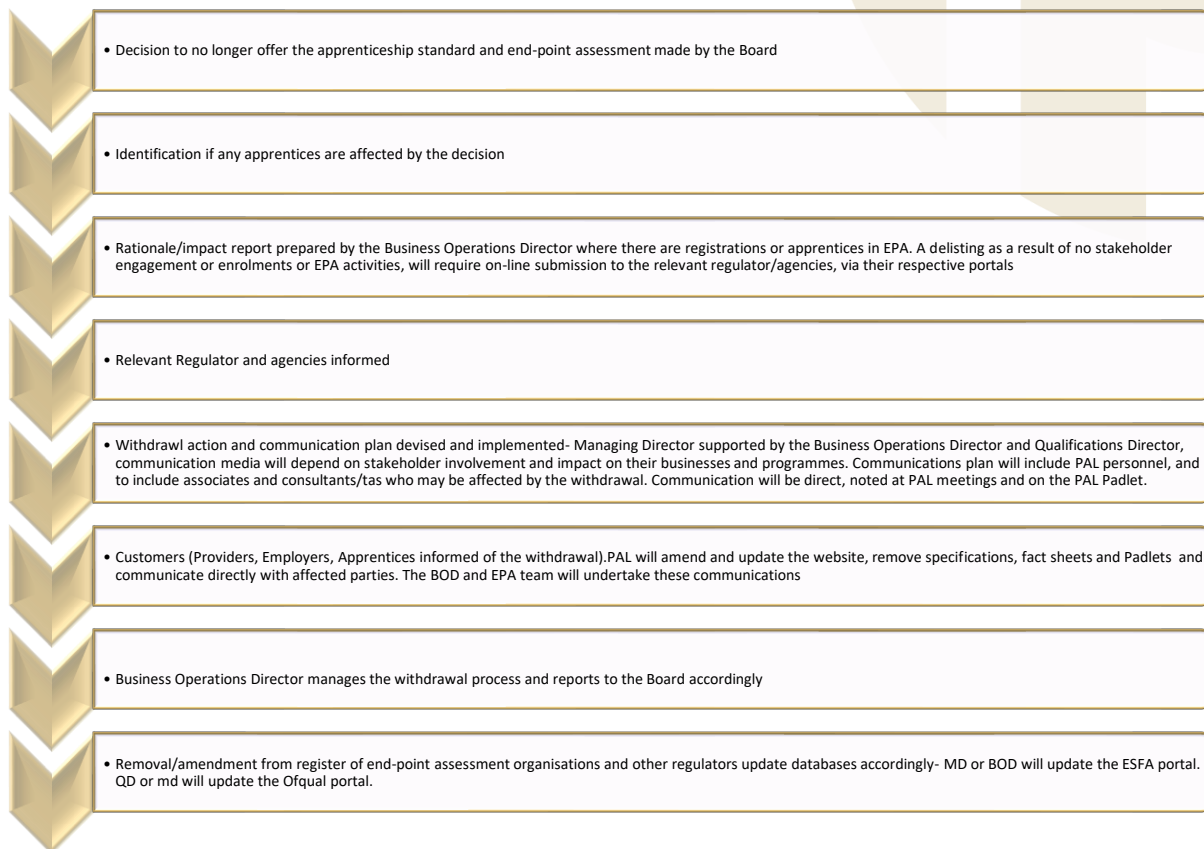
d) PAL will ensure that procedures followed are in line with the relevant register of EPAO conditions and comply with the General Conditions of Recognition.

e) In compiling a plan, PAL will comply with any requirements issued by the relevant regulators

Changes to legislation

Should PAL make available and deliver a qualification that is subject to an accreditation requirement in accordance with section 139 of the Act, and for which certification will cease to have effect in accordance with section 140 (6), of the Act, PAL will comply with any requirements relating to that qualification which are set out in any saving and transitional provisions made by Ofqual in accordance with section 140 (10) of the act.

Withdrawal Process



Management of the withdrawal of qualifications/ standards

This process is relevant for PAL seeking a de-listing of assessing a standard. PAL’s withdrawal policy and sanctions policy detail the approach we would take to not working with specific third parties who are key stakeholders in the end-point assessment delivery.

To manage the process PAL has considered both Ofqual conditions and the conditions for being on APAR.

Referring to the General Conditions of Recognition, condition D6 provides additional information that AOs/EPAOs should comply with when retracting from specific apprenticeship standards delivery.

D6.2 Where an awarding organisation intends to withdraw, otherwise believes it to be likely that it will withdraw, or is obliged to withdraw, a qualification, it must take all reasonable steps to protect the interests of Apprentices (Learners) in relation to that qualification.

D6.3 An awarding organisation must give to Ofqual reasonable notice of its anticipated withdrawal of a qualification and must do so prior to the time at which it provides that information to any Apprentices (Learners), Centres, or purchasers of qualifications.

D6.4 Where an awarding organisation intends to withdraw, or is obliged to withdraw, a qualification, it must

1. (a) promptly prepare, maintain, and comply with a written withdrawal plan, which must specify how the interests of Learners in relation to that qualification will be protected, and

2. (b) provide clear and accurate information about the withdrawal to Learners, Centres, and purchasers of qualifications who are likely to be affected by the withdrawal

D6.5 An awarding organisation must ensure that any withdrawal plan which it prepares complies with any requirements which Ofqual has communicated to it in writing.

The following guidance will be applied where we are seeking to delist a particular standard:

- The Board of Directors will review the current status regarding the standard, which will include referrals for the specific standard (qualification), apprentices; employers and providers involved and engaged with PAL for the specific standard; and any negotiations in situ that include the standard PAL is looking to delist.
- The Managing Director (MD) will ask the Business Operations Director BOD¹ to complete a review and impact report and forward to the PAL Board- it will contain as a minimum information listed below:
 - Rationale for withdrawal (business capacity/capability;/significant changes within the sector, impacting key stakeholders; concerns regarding the assessment plan and ability to design effective assessment; no or minimal referrals which fall short of provider/employer projections
- The PAL Board will review information and agree an approach and the BOD, or the MD will advise the ESFA/ Apprenticeship Service via the respective portal and the Responsible Officer the QD will notify the appropriate qualifications regulator of PAL's intention before notifying any apprentices, employers, or providers. PAL will also confirm if we will be surrendering any aspect of our recognition status due to the withdrawal (e.g., we are no longer intending to operate in a sector that appears on our profile with external bodies).
- Once the relevant regulatory body and agencies have confirmed PAL's withdrawal plan, we will communicate this with all relevant parties, in a fashion commensurate with the impact of the planned withdrawal, to ensure all affected third parties, centres are aware of the withdrawal and what this means for them, this will include arrangements available with other EPAOs. PAL will make clear, the last date we will accept any registrations and future arrangements for assessment delivery and award.

The decision to withdraw from a standard is and never will be taken lightly and the withdrawal report will present a business rationale for such action and will be subject to PAL Directors approval. The withdrawal plan, report and process will have the following:

- A designated owner (the BOD supported by the MD or QD) to ensure efficient and effective execution of the withdrawal.
- Details as to how the interest of any apprentices, registered on our system that are either in EPA; post gateway; approaching gateway or are at the start of their programme are protected.
- Details how information about the withdrawal will be communicated in a way that minimises alarm, presents alternatives, options, and secures continuance to apprentices; employers and providers to those who are likely to be affected. Information to include timelines- actions for those in EPA or due to enter gateway in the immediate future, in assessment and awaiting final assessment decisions.
- Details regarding how we intend to keep the plan under review and receive feedback from stakeholders and maintain communications with affected parties during the withdrawal process.
- Details arrangements with the regulator and the ESFA (apprenticeship service) before end-users are notified.
- Information stating how we comply with any requirements as specified by Ofqual and the EPAO conditions.

¹ If the BOD is not available to undertake such a report, the MD will request that one of the EPA Managers compiles the report, or the MD will compile such a report.

- Clarify if we will be relinquishing this singular standard/qualification or if we are no longer intending to operate in a sector or qualification/standard area.
- Confirm arrangements for registration (if any for new apprentices); arrangements for gateways; procedures for any resits and retakes; ideal deadlines for assessment completions and the offer of alternative arrangements, to include moving to another EPAO.

As an EPAO we work exclusively with apprenticeship standards, which means the circumstance of any standard being offered as an unregulated qualification and receiving funding is improbable, however we would work with stakeholders to ascertain all possible options for future qualifications for their learners/apprentices.

Apprenticeship guidance and requirements for withdrawing from a standard

1. PAL details to include EPAO number
2. Name of contact – name of the person within your organisation that has the authority to submit the request for the apprenticeship service this is the **BOD or the MD**. For the other agencies and regulatory bodies, the **Responsible Officer (RO)** would have the authority to instigate, execute and or respond to an Ofqual recognition withdrawal notice. Should the RO be unavailable, the MD would execute the Ofqual recognition withdrawal notice
3. Organisation address – as listed on the register – currently the registered office address
4. Email Address (info@professionalassessment.co.uk)
5. Contact Telephone Number (free phone number)

Amendment/Removal

6. Type of change – complete removal of the organisation or amendment to current listing against standards
7. Amendment to listing – list the individual apprenticeship standard(s) listing to be amended for. By amendment we mean withdraw from offering end-point assessment against a standard or standards.
8. Reason for amendment to listing – Advise on/summarise the reason or reasons for this change against the standard or each of the standards we are requesting the amendment against. We will detail each standard separately if the reasons for the amendment are different.
9. Removal of the organisation – if we plan to remove PAL from all EPA/qualification activities this must be stipulated, and the case presented.
10. Reason for removal request – specify the options that are applicable i.e., business decision, capacity, resource; concerns regarding efficacy/relevancy of the assessment plan; intended planned revisions/versions of assessment plan of the assessment plan making assessment untenable to deliver for PAL.
11. Re-application – would PAL consider reapplying again for this standard and in what circumstances.

Impact Assessment

12. Promotion and engagement activity – information that should be included in this section:
 - a. details of any providers or employers that we have specifically promoted our end-point assessment of the standard(s) to.
 - b. that we have indicated that we are requesting an amendment to our listing or withdrawal from the register and have suspended promotional activity.

- c. how we will communicate our amendment/removal from the register to prospective employers/providers.
13. Selection for a standard for end-point assessment – for the apprenticeship standard(s) we wish to amend our listing for or in the case of complete removal from the register. If we have no registrations against our EPAO and no employers/ITPs contracted to us for this standard/qualification, please refer to section 15. If we have been selected:
- a. Include details of the employer(s) who have selected us. Include details of the providers delivering the on-programme training, including the UKPRN number where applicable.
 - b. Include details of providers we have entered into a contract with?
 - c. Have we received any payments for these standards (including partial payment)? If we have received any payments, how and when do we intend to refund the employer (via the ITP/college acting on their behalf)?
 - d. When is delivery scheduled for the end-point assessment of these standards?
 - e. Have we notified employers /ITPs of our intention to amend our listing or withdraw from the register, if so when and how and was MD sign off provided?
 - f. Have we already registered any apprentices for end-point assessment, if so for which standards, unique learner number and volumes?
 - g. Have we, or the employer or provider undertaken any activity to prepare to transfer the apprentices to another EPAO/ AO? If yes give details of the transfer, including the name of the other EPAO (note this should only be undertaken post MD sign off and in discussion with the Apprenticeship service and regulator).
14. Delivery of end-point assessment – If we have already delivered end-point assessment:
- a. Include details of the employer(s); Include details of the providers delivering the on-programme training, including the UKPRN number where applicable.
 - b. Confirm we have entered into a contract with these providers and employers.
 - c. Confirm we have received payments for these standards.
 - d. Confirm when the delivery of the end-point assessment of these standards took place.
 - e. Include details of the apprentices that we undertook end-point assessment for, against which standards, unique learner number and the volumes.
 - f. Confirm if we have claimed the certificates for these apprentices? If an apprentice has completed a full assessment and we have not claimed a certificate, confirm why we have not requested a certificate.
 - g. Explain what action if any PAL, or the employer or provider have undertaken to prepare to transfer other apprentices due to take end-point assessment to another EPAO.
 - h. Confirm if the relevant regulatory body has made contact to plan quality assurance checks for the completed end-point assessments, or has undertaken any EQA inspection, in respect of the standard(s) subject to the withdrawal notice.

Timescales for amendment/ removal

15. Amendment to listing – we will request the date we wish the removal to commence from and complete the necessary information.
16. Removal from the register (complete removal) –we will state the date we wish the removal to commence from.
17. We will specify intended notification period for employers/provider-we know this is a request and we will work with all parties to ensure a reasonable exodus. If there have been no referrals, no indication of any learners on programme and no provider and employer interest we will request an exit within eight weeks.
18. Coverage – if the standard(s) is not covered by another EPAO, are we prepared to support coverage until another organisation is approved onto the register- i.e., for a period of six months, we will apply the same maximum period if we have employers and learners engaged on programme.
19. Date – the date that we can provide support coverage until (this may be discussed further in in discussion with relevant agencies).

Regulatory references

This policy supports Ofqual Regulation General Conditions of recognition: Management of the withdrawal of qualifications D6; Compliance with saving and transitional provisions following the cessation of accreditation D8.

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Next Review: 18th October 2024

Person Responsible for review: Business Operations Director

This Procedure has been agreed by Linda Martin, Managing Director