

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 qualification design, development and delivery of its qualifications and EPA activities.

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 access to our qualifications and/or end-point assessment services.

PAL aims to monitor, review, and evaluate its performance against the policy through its review of learner attainment, stakeholder (learner, third parties and Centres) 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 and qualification design, development and delivery and award. 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. In respect of qualifications our approach to qualification seeks to identify legitimate demand and engage with a broad range of representatives to determine suitable content. Qualification development draws on qualification and sector experts with our development team monitoring suitability and practicality of content and our work with Centres seeks to ensure effective programme delivery, centre assessment reliable and valid learner results.

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 learners should have equal opportunity to access our products and services and the content of our qualifications, and end-point assessments should reflect the wide diversity of our audiences.

The aim of the policy is that our qualification and end-point assessment systems and our code of conduct for all PAL personnel demonstrate a fair and equitable service to all of our stakeholders. All PAL personnel are committed to the enactment of this policy.

This policy works alongside PAL's Fair Access Policy statement. 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
- Centres
- Learners
- Clients

This policy applies to:

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

We want to ensure that people with diverse characteristics and backgrounds consider PAL to be their EPA or qualification partner 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 learners, third parties, and Centres who engage with our services. 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 for Promoting Equality of Opportunity

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:

- PAL's Fair Access Policy Statement
- 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 AO/EPAO, PAL has a stringent approach to Centre approval and recognition and our contracting process for AO and EPAO activities includes risk rating Centres and/or third parties and we seek to determine how our partners develop and deliver their programmes. PAL will, where reasonably practical and within the confines of our contracts, ensure that all parties we work have in place the following:

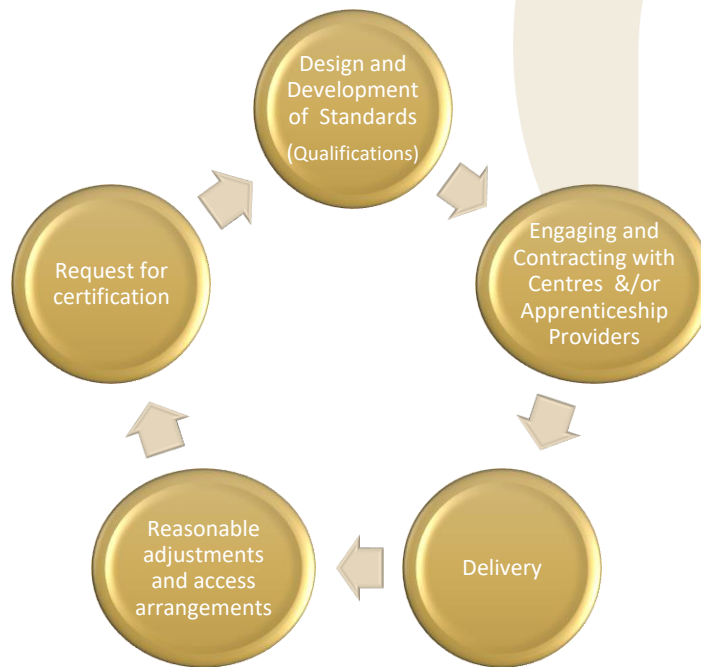
- An effective equality and diversity policy, with which learners and associated personnel at Centres or third party sites are familiar, and which is applied to the entirety of their learning programmes/qualification offer
- A commitment and policy that ensures they adhere to relevant legislation regarding equality and diversity
- A programme delivery model that supports accessible provision and provides fair and reliable training and formative assessment and appropriate support to individual learners

Apprenticeship Providers, Third Parties, Centres and Learners Expectations

PAL expects its clients to enable Apprentices and/or 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 and/ or qualification requirements.

Qualification (Standard) Development



Design and development of our assessments of standards

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

We are committed to:

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

We will continue to develop our relationships with relevant stakeholders in developing our guides, support materials and resources, and ensure our reasonable adjustments and special considerations policies for qualifications and EPA are effectively, reliably and consistently applied, so fair access is available to all learners and apprentices.

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

We monitor and review equality and diversity throughout the development of assessments, qualifications and resource materials, by talking to occupational experts, end-users and professional associations, Centres, third

parties, learners and apprentices and employers, to ensure our materials are fit for purpose and our personnel are equipped to meet their job role requirements.

Engaging and contracting with Centres, Third parties and Apprenticeship Providers

PAL will:

- Ensure engagement procedures are 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 is user friendly and avoids unnecessary barriers to access for intended apprentices/learners
- Continue to respond to individual needs and 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 relevant parties our essential policies, and documents such as our EPA manual and Centre handbooks so they are appraised of how to appeal or enquire about an assessment decision, or qualification grade, 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 our products and services, such as changes to assessment plans or the introduction of assessment flexibilities, or any amendments to our qualifications.

Our resource 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 qualifications platform or accessed via a QR code.

Delivery and assessment of apprenticeship 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.

Delivery and award of Qualifications

As we our EPA offer our CASS and Centre guidance and EQA support are geared to supporting our Centres to deliver PAL qualifications in a fair, equitable and accessible fashion. The Qualifications Development team, awarding organisation support services and Qualifications quality team will ensure the information, guidance and resources made available to our Centres are effective and relevant to the needs of the learners and understood by Centre personnel.

Reasonable adjustments and special consideration

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

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

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

Language Modification

PAL's qualifications and 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 a qualification or assessment be found to be required, either considering an internal review or following a request from an apprenticeship provider, Centre or learner/apprentice, 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

For EPA work all certification requests to the relevant agency are subject to PAL's quality assurance checks and we provide a window of 15 working days before requesting certification, to allow relevant parties to enquire or appeal against an assessment decision.

Monitoring the success and relevance of our arrangements

PAL is committed to complying with all current and relevant legislation. As part of the Apprentice and or Learner registration and certification request processes, PAL may collect information on diversity, requests for special considerations, access arrangements and feedback from Apprentices, Learners, Centres and Apprenticeship Providers, and other relevant stakeholders.

All relevant issues identified that suggest that PAL provision or services may have unnecessarily impacted on a learner or apprentice 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 PAL's products.

Monitoring and Review

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.

Date Created: 6th January 2018

Last Review: 24/09/2024

Next Review: 24/09/2025

Persons Responsible for review: PAL Board

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>