

Apprenticeship Programme Offer - Opportunities for People to Build Bright Futures



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About this guide

Professional Assessment Limited (PAL) has been delivering end-point assessments for the last seven years, our personnel have experience of working in all areas of work-based and vocational learning and our assessors have significant occupational experience.

This guide is available for anyone, they do not have to be a PAL client, and the guide is not intended to replace comprehensive information available that both awarding organisations (AOs)/end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) and training providers and colleges make available to their apprentices and employers.

PAL clients will have access to many resources and most EPAOs will be able to provide their providers, apprentices, and employers with end-point assessment preparation resources.

In this guide, we share expert advice and practical tips to support apprentices from the start to the finish of their programme.

PAL recognises apprenticeship programmes offer incredible opportunities for people to develop their talent, progress their careers or start a new career with structured and recognised training and support while also offering a solution to growing national skills shortages across multiple sectors.

Whilst the benefits of undertaking an apprenticeship, or offering an apprenticeship place are many, the Department for Education (DfE) data, and research by organisations such as the Association of Apprentices (AoA) indicate that attrition rates from the programme across all sectors continue to exceed 40% and whilst there are many factors for early leavers, ranging from a mismatch of expectations to business closures, there is an indication that some apprentices are leaving their programmes due to a perceived lack of support.

There are concerns across the sector regarding attrition rates, and the DfE in its response to address retention rates, has introduced a goal to increase apprenticeship achievement rates to 67% by 2025. This is a challenging target but not impossible given the effort and resources providers, employers and EPAOs, as well as apprentices invest in the apprenticeship initiative, and the most recent data released in 2025 suggests retention rates are improving but are not at 67% across the board.

Alongside a revised achievement target, the DfE has introduced the [Accountability Framework](#) which aims to help providers review their own performance, identify potential quality issues and carry out improvements.

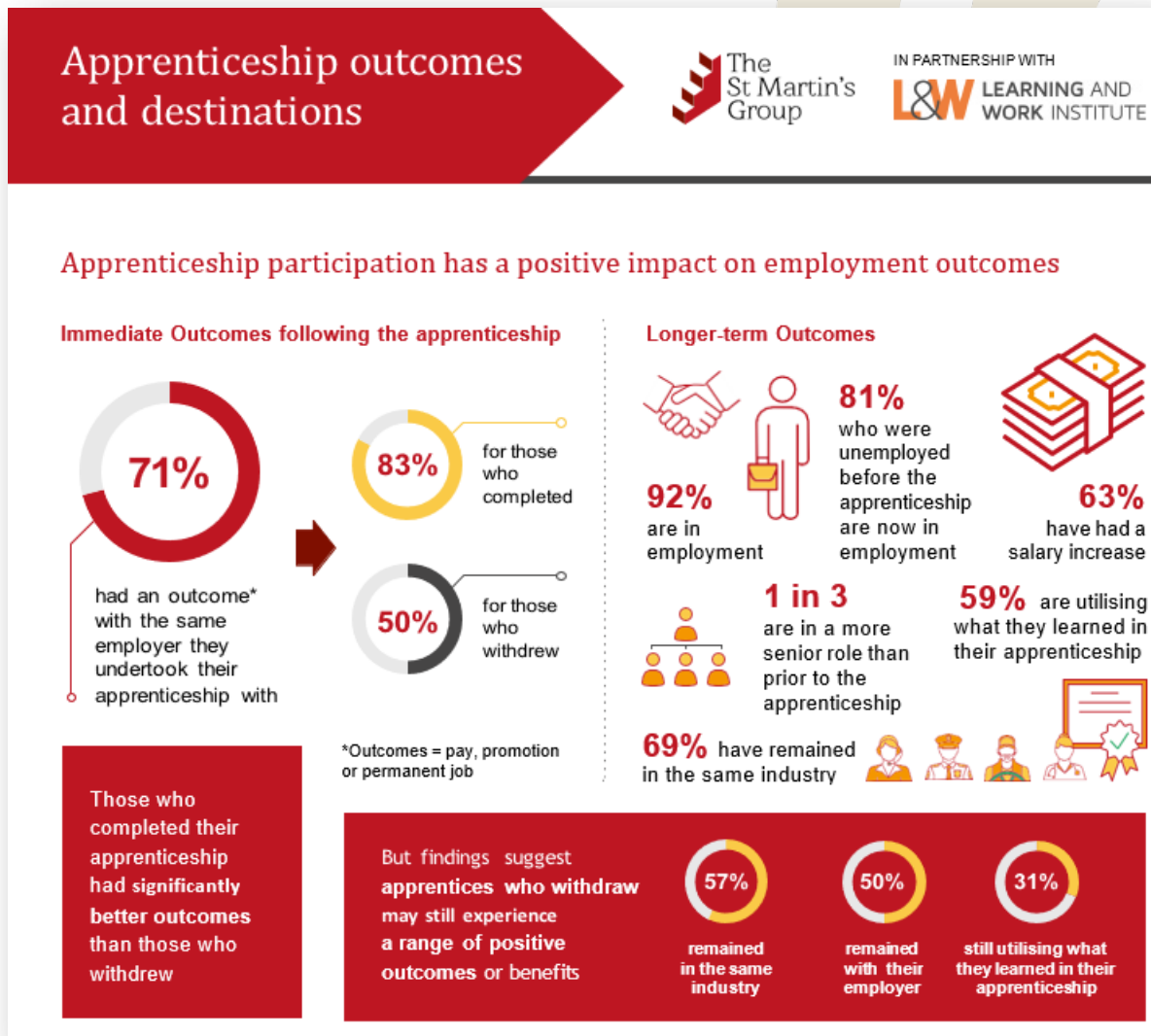
All resources and references in this guide are correct at the time of publication and do not include the proposals regarding apprenticeship delivery in February 2025, although it is generally agreed the proposed interventions will aid better retention and attainment.

Apprenticeship outcomes and destinations

Alongside reporting from DfE and various agencies such as the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education (IfATE) to be assimilated into [Skills England](#) from April 2025 and qualifications regulator, the St Martin's Apprenticeship group's [2024 research](#)¹ summarises the personal benefits of the programme to the apprentice and the wider economy, as well as describing the triggers that lead to apprentices leaving their programme without passing their assessments and missing out on certification.

¹ Access to the full report is available via the St Martin's Group Website [Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destinations - St Martins group](#)

Apprenticeship outcomes and destinations – infographic - 2024



What does the guide cover?

The guide covers the full journey, from onboarding through to on-programme learning and end-point assessment (EPA), and includes:

- Assessment plans - the basics
- The key elements of an apprenticeship programme
- How to develop a clear onboarding plan and why it's important to start the journey with the end in mind
- Managing the apprenticeship programme - tips for managers/employers, providers, and apprentices
- How to overcome common challenges and ensure apprentices have the knowledge, skills, and behaviours to succeed
- Evidence presentation

Assessment plans - the basics

The assessment plans in England are designed by industry representative Trailblazer groups, under the steer of Skills England, to ensure the standards are reflective of the occupational and industry needs and that employers can be confident that apprentices completing a specific apprenticeship have a comparable set of skills and that these skills will be transferable between employers.

The 'What'

Each assessment plan will tell you what skills, knowledge, and behaviours the apprentice must have to prove their occupational competence.

The 'How'

The assessment plan will detail how competence will be assessed and the timeframe for independent assessment. Some assessment plans will require the additional completion of a mandated qualification in addition to the independent assessment.

The 'Who'

The assessment plan provides an overview of who is involved in the assessment.

Assessment plans are fundamental to a successful apprenticeship

The assessment plan influences all aspects of the apprenticeship journey, and it is vital that all involved in the on-programme delivery and end-point assessment reference their design and development of training and/or assessment to the plan's requirements.

Trailblazer groups, with the support of Skills England product managers, are wholly responsible for the creation of the assessment plans and all parties are expected adhere the knowledge, skills, and behaviours as described for the specific job role and design assessment instruments based on the methods selected by the nominated Trailblazer group.

PAL recognises that some assessment plans are more accessible than others and as with any qualification, reviews, revisions, and amendments, along with the progress of time means newer assessment plans can look different from some of their predecessors.

2025 updates

The assessment principles launched in 2025 propose that over an 18-month period all assessment plans will be revised and simplified, with less prescription regarding how assessments should be designed and developed, with the potential for some on-programme assessments, where applicable and greater involvement from providers or employers in contributing to assessment decisions. The EPAO/AO will retain responsibility for designing assessments and quality assurance and the current regulatory bodies will remain in place.

As it will take time for the changes to bed in, PAL recommends that all stakeholders work with the current version of the assessment plan and work with their AO/EPAOs to implement the new plans, as they become available. This guide works on the basis that the current assessment plans for the majority of apprentices will be in the current form for the next 12 months. PAL will update this guide or retire the guide as appropriate.



Key points regarding assessment plans

Make sure you have access to the correct version of the apprenticeship assessment plan.

Training providers and colleges make sure you enrol the apprentice on the correct apprenticeship standard (and pathway/specialism if applicable) and version number.

Employers check the apprentice's proposed work role will allow them to demonstrate competence against all the knowledge, skills, and behaviours.

How can PAL assist?

- As an opener visit the [PAL website](#) where you can find PAL's fact sheets and specifications for each standard as an EPAO/AO we assess
- PAL's clients have access to an account manager and PAL personnel who can provide guidance, and information regarding PAL's interpretation of the apprenticeship standard and how PAL executes end-point assessments
- Apprenticeship standards and assessment plans can be located via the [IfATE website](#), currently we expect these to migrate to Skills England. PAL also makes available the assessment plans via our on library system of Padlets

The key elements of an apprenticeship programme

As an apprenticeship is funded by the Department for Education, there are specific funding and apprenticeship rules that must be adhered to.

In addition to the 'rules' training providers need to be on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR).

The provider is responsible for working with the apprentice and employer to deliver an effective apprenticeship programme, working with the relevant apprenticeship standards and the provider and employer are responsible for the design and delivery of the on-programme element of the apprenticeship programme (on and off-job training).

This includes the delivery of any qualifications such as functional skills. Note in February 2025 the rules regarding functional skills were revised with immediate effect. Apprentices who were enrolled onto an apprenticeship before their 19th birthday are required to undertake English and maths training and functional skills tests. For apprentices who were over 19 at their programme commencement, in agreement with their employer can elect not to undertake such training and there is no requirement to pass functional skills tests, in order to be approved for assessment. Please talk to your training provider/college for further information.

The EPAO (also referred to as AO) is responsible for the end-point assessment and the awarding of the apprenticeship standard results. The Department for Education issue the apprenticeship certificates, as requested by the EPAO/AO.

The apprenticeship experience and outcomes are greatly enhanced when the employer, provider, apprentice and EPAO understand their roles and responsibilities and work together to ensure the programme is credible, valued and benefits both the individuals and organisations involved, as well as industry more generally.

Recruiting

Recruiting an apprentice should follow good practice recruitment principles, ensuring all parties are clear of what is required in terms of commitment, resourcing, and performance. There are a range of agencies and organisations that support apprenticeship recruitment, and training providers and colleges normally have significant experience in this area.

If you are new to recruiting an apprentice, the following sites are a good place to start:

[Apprenticeships.gov.uk](https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk)

[National Careers Service](https://nationalcareersservice.gov.uk)

Having recruited an apprentice, the next stage is their onboarding or induction.

Onboarding

The Association of Apprentices (AoA) research indicates a lack of clear communication around what an apprentice's programme involves has been identified as a contributing factor in apprentice withdrawal. That is why it is so important that apprentices – like any student/learner on any course – are fully aware of the nature and requirements of their programme from the very start.

The apprentice on-boarding process requires input and involvement from the training provider/college representative and employer representative and even if the apprentice is an existing employee of the employer organisation, apprenticeship on-boarding is essential.

Naturally, all apprentices want to achieve the best grade possible in their assessments, and those who have a greater and more in-depth understanding of their apprenticeship standard appear to be more likely to complete their programme and get better grades in end-point assessment.

Every apprentice should have a detailed onboarding with their provider and employer that covers as the basics:

- Roles and responsibilities of the apprentice, employer, and training provider
- Programme duration and key milestones and progression points
- Format of the programme and time commitments
- Importance of attending off-job training sessions and reviews
- On-job training activities
- Knowledge, skills, and behaviours as described in the assessment plan
- Format of practice assessments
- Format of end-point assessment
- Orientation of relevant learning management system and uploading of evidence
- Information and guidance provided by the selected EPAO/AO

Onboarding is a great opportunity to check and manage expectations and identify any additional support arrangements, and whilst there may be forms to complete and various administration tasks that accompany this stage of the programme, it is important that there is time to talk about the programme and address any questions or concerns from the outset.

Key points regarding onboarding

- Include and refer to the relevant apprenticeship standard and assessment plan at the apprentice's induction and throughout the programme. Familiarity with the content helps design an effective training programme and prepares the apprentice for assessments better
- Providers and employers make it clear that the apprentice can ask questions and if they are struggling with any aspect of their programme, talking about their concerns makes it easier to find a suitable solution
- If a provider or EPAO/AO is a member of an organisation such as the AoA, encourage the apprentice to make use of the resources and networking opportunities
- Apprenticeships require work and commitment from all parties and apprentices should be prepared to take responsibility for their development, and to do this, they may need coaching in areas such as self-managed learning, confidence building, study, and revision skills

How can PAL assist?

- PAL's website offers information on the apprenticeship standards, alongside other information such as well-being, FAQs, newsletters, and apprenticeship standards updates
- PAL encourages providers to register with an EPAO early in the programme and at least six months before the planned gateway date. Early engagement ensures access to useful resources such as practice assessments, webinars, and presentations to support assessment and further hints and tips regarding assessment readiness
- PAL clients will have access to the PAL Padlets - a comprehensive on-line library of resources guiding providers, employers, and apprentices through the relevant EPA activities



What is an initial assessment?

All apprentices need to have an initial assessment, and providers are responsible for managing this. As part of the assessment, a form of a skills scan (including eligibility checks) must be carried out to identify their current knowledge, skills, and behaviours (KSBs) against their standard to help ensure that they are on the right programme. This is also the time to check whether your apprentices have or will need to attain other mandatory qualifications like functional skills in maths and English, and to discuss reasonable adjustments that might be required across all aspects of the apprenticeship.

The results of this assessment should then be used to help shape their learning plan and this plan is the blueprint for the apprenticeship programme. Research suggests, where an employer is familiar with the learning plan, and takes an active interest in its compilation, an apprentice's progress is greatly enhanced.

The relaxation regarding functional skills, whilst advantageous for some apprentices, should be carefully considered as there are many added value benefits to having a good grasp and confidence in English and maths skills. Apprentices can receive English and maths training from their provider and whilst they will need to sit the functional skills tests, there is no requirement to pass the tests prior to any formal assessment of the apprenticeship standard. Please note apprentices who are under the age of 19 at programme commencement will still be required to undertake functional skills training.

What is in the learning plan?

The apprentice's individual plan should be tailored to their specific needs based on the pre-determined KSBs and other mandatory training requirements that they will need to evidence at each stage of their programme. It should also reflect how this will be achieved.

It is the responsibility of the training provider to complete an individual learning plan with the apprentice, and input from the employer is always welcomed. The learning plan will describe a range of training interventions all geared to helping the apprentice meet the requirements of their elected apprenticeship standard.

The learning plan is based on a curriculum or scheme of work that the provider has designed for the specific standard. The training provider representative, within reason, can adjust the curriculum to suit the individual apprentice, however the expectation is that the apprentice will make best endeavours to complete their training.

The format of training/learning will be explained to the apprentice and employer and can include e-learning, 1:1 coaching, group training sessions delivered at an agreed location or via webinar. It is normal that apprentices will be expected to undertake some independent learning and research, and the training provider will explain what resources they provide to support all aspects of the off-job training.

Ideally on and off-job training should complement each other, the best way to achieve this is for the employer and training provider to share and agree on training requirements and then communicate this to the apprentice.

Throughout the apprentice's programme the learning plan should be reviewed, and at times changed, to meet everyone's needs and to remain relevant, challenging, and achievable.



It is important that employers and apprentices allocate sufficient time to spend with the training provider to compile the learning plan. Whilst the learning plan must cover the following points, the process should facilitate a learning discussion, so all involved understand the apprentice's job role, workplace standards and working patterns.

The process of developing a learning plan should cover:

- The requirements of the standard and KSBs
- Additional qualifications
- Confirmation of roles and responsibilities, to include on and off-job training responsibilities
- The apprentice's starting point, areas of strength, confidence, and areas of development
- Where and who the apprentice can go for guidance and support and what can be expected in terms of support, this should include any relevant contact details for all parties
- Time commitment and how training will be recorded
- Format of the training and how resources can be accessed and any requirements for training materials in altered formats if the apprentice requires this
- Key milestones, to include practice assessments
- Protocols and what to do if the apprentice is not able to attend learning reviews or complete training activities
- The purpose of the Gateway review
- Preparing for end-point assessment

How can PAL assist?

- PAL clients will have access to the PAL Padlets - a comprehensive on-line library of resources guiding providers, employers, and apprentices through the relevant EPA activities

On-programme learning

On-programme learning is the phrase frequently used to cover the apprentice's on and off-job training, up to the point of the Gateway review. The on-programme part of an apprenticeship will make up the majority of the apprentice's journey. To help maximise their success, it needs to take shape with the ultimate end goal of formal assessment in mind. It's the phase when apprentices need to develop the relevant knowledge, skills, and behaviours for their standard – alongside any other mandatory training requirements and soft skills.

On-job training will typically involve the apprentice developing their technical skills as a result of training and observation and/or shadowing of colleagues at the workplace. Apprentices should have access to workplace training opportunities that are commensurate with the role they are undertaking.

Off-the-job training is a highly important aspect in an apprenticeship. It is defined as an activity that is not part of an apprentice's day-to-day role which supports their apprenticeship training. The minimum volume of hours no longer links to working hours (previously there was a 20% off-the-job training rule). Off-the-job training now consists of a minimum of six hours per week – a consistent figure, irrespective of the hours worked by the apprentice.

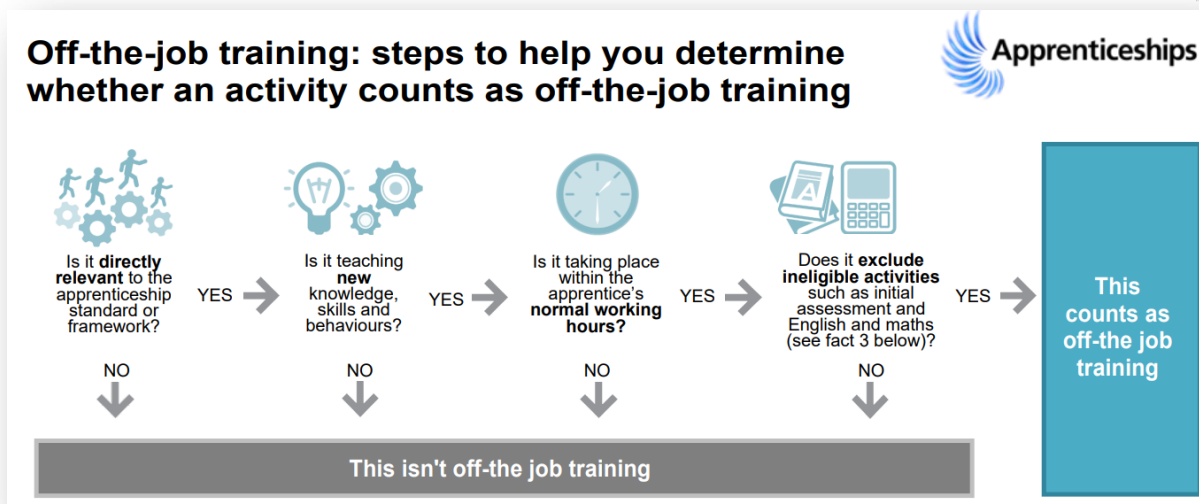


All off-the-job training must be recorded, and evidence retained. Training providers/colleges will lead on this element of the programme and administration, but it is the employer's responsibility to allow this time for the apprentice.

Off-job training is organised by the training provider/college in agreement with the apprentice and employer.

Off-job training activities can include the following:

- Writing reflective journals
- Attendance at workshops, training days, master classes, academies, and webinars relevant to the apprenticeship
- Self-study that includes reading or watching videos or undertaking research
- Role-playing or simulation exercises
- Industry visits/conferences relevant to apprenticeships such as online and in-person events
- Writing assessments, assignments and completing projects or case studies. Note that the use of AI is valid, but the apprentice's evidence must be authentic and reflective of their competence. EPAOs/AOs will have policies that make clear how they check for acts of plagiarism and cheating and the penalties for proven offences. Citing reference sources are essential and apprentices should be trained and familiar with how to do this



The best programmes integrate the KSB requirements into the apprentice's job role, build in practice assessments and see the training provider working with the apprentice's line manager and apprentice effectively blending the on and off-job training activities.

How can PAL assist?

- PAL clients will have access to the PAL Padlets - a comprehensive on-line library of resources guiding providers, employers, and apprentices through the relevant EPA activities
- PAL's resources include access to practice assessments

Gateway

The gateway review takes place prior to the end-point assessment and involves the apprentice, the training provider, and the employer. Progress of the apprentice is reviewed, and an agreement is made as to whether competency levels against the required standard have been achieved.

The end-point assessment should only commence once the employer, typically the apprentice's line manager, is completely satisfied that the apprentice has developed all the knowledge, skills, and behaviours, associated with the specific standard.

The gateway review is an evidence triage, the employer, training provider and employer representative agree and confirm that the apprentice has the necessary evidence and has consistently demonstrated a reliable performance against the standards and is ready for end-point assessment.

It is important that the gateway requirements as detailed in the relevant apprenticeship standard plan are complied with and you should confirm with the EPAO how they want to receive the information, typically this will be an upload to the EPAO's/AO portal or securely emailing the information. Some EPAOs will require you to complete the gateway review using their report template, others may allow the provider to use their own forms, providing they include the requisite information

The EPAO will check the gateway evidence for completeness and if the gateway submission is satisfactory the EPA process will commence with assessment scheduling and planning. If the EPAO requires further evidence or clarification regarding the submission they will contact the training provider in the first instance to retrieve the additional information.

It is important to remember that the EPA 'clock' starts ticking at the point the EPAO validates the gateway evidence.



How can PAL assist?

- PAL's website provides an overview of the EPA process and gateway requirements
- PAL's Standards with gateway and key end-point assessment guidance are available via the website
- PAL's clients have access to the relevant apprenticeship standard Padlet (on-line resources) that explain the gateway requirements for the specific standard

Assessment scheduling and planning

Following a successful gateway review, a representative from the EPAO will contact the apprentice and employer to arrange a planning meeting which can be carried out remotely or face-to-face. The assessment planning meeting normally will be undertaken by the assigned independent assessor, however some EPAOs may utilise someone from their support team to book the dates, which are then passed onto the independent assessor. The training provider is not present at the planning meeting in line with the current process; this may change as a result of the assessment principles where a plan permits the provider to undertake elements of the formal assessment.

The assessment planning meeting will allow the independent assessor to give the apprentice and employer an overview of what to expect and to plan the assessment activities.

The meeting will cover:

- Sequencing and format of the assessment as detailed in the relevant assessment plan
- Timing of assessments and confirmation of the EPA window
- Suitability of the assessment environment
- Access to appropriate equipment and resources and assessment environment conditions
- Confirmation of any Reasonable Adjustment requests
- Key policies and procedures that inform assessment conduct

The planning meeting is an opportunity for the apprentice and employer to ask questions regarding end-point assessment and it is useful for the employer and apprentice to provide some details about the apprentice's job role, place of work and any pertinent information, for example, brand guidelines.

Employer involvement in the planning meeting is important, as site visits for assessments may need to be arranged, or a suitable location for remote assessments agreed.

It is important that all stakeholders are aware of assessment timings, so for example where it states a professional discussion must last 50 minutes, even if an apprentice completes their discussion before this time, the duration of the discussion will be 50 minutes. Some assessment plans now permit the apprentice to end an assessment earlier than the prescribed time, this can only happen where it is written into the assessment plan. It is vital you confirm with your EPAO/AO what the rules are and do not assume because one apprenticeship standard plan allows this to happen, all will.

If the assessment plan requires an employer to be present, then unless there are exceptional circumstances, the assessment will be cancelled if this condition is not met.

Clearly there could be exceptional circumstances when an assessment has to be abandoned and depending on the circumstances of such an event, the AO/EPAO may be in a position to apply special considerations or will void the assessment.

If extra time for assessments are legitimately required, the Training Provider should place a request for reasonable adjustments. All AO/EPAOs will have a reasonable adjustment policy and guidance regarding how to apply for reasonable adjustments and any supporting evidence required to validate the request. It is essential reasonable adjustment requests are made prior to assessment, ideally at or before the gateway so these additional requirements can be discussed at the planning meeting.

How can PAL assist?

- PAL's clients have access to the relevant apprenticeship standard Padlet (on-line resources) that explain the gateway and the planning meeting requirements for the specific standard

The end-point assessment

The end-point assessment (EPA) format is governed by the assessment plan and EPAOs need to comply with Ofqual's [EPA conditions](#).

The EPAO will develop assessment instruments and their assessment delivery process using the assessment plan as their foundation. EPAOs cannot fundamentally change the assessment plan requirements in terms of specified sequencing and assessment formats.

In respect of reasonable adjustments and special considerations, training providers, employers and apprentices should refer to their EPAO's policy and procedures and [IfATE's guidance](#). Note this guidance may be updated when IfATE moves to Skills England.

EPAOs/AOs are also guided by Ofqual conditions regarding the interpretation and application of reasonable adjustments and special considerations.

Some AOs and EPAOs have the Cognassist Charter recognition, and this indicates they are willing to review the Cognassist diagnostic profile information as evidence for a reasonable adjustment(s) application; (acceptance of any reasonable adjustment evidence is subject to evaluation by the EPAO/AO).

Results

Grading and results are issued in accordance with the assessment plan requirements and any amplifications as noted in an EPAO's specification. Independent assessors' results will be quality assured, and the results will be issued to the relevant stakeholders. The issuing of results to apprentices, employers, and training providers will vary between EPAOs, some will require you to log into their portal, some will produce weekly or monthly reports, others will send individual reports. It is recommended that you establish with your EPAO, how they issue results.



Typically, an EPAO will not request a certificate for 15 working days after the results are issued to allow for any enquiries or appeals to the assessment decision.

If you wish to query or challenge your results, please refer to your EPAO's enquiries and appeals policy and procedures.

Certification

The EPAO is responsible for advising the Apprenticeship Service and the Department for Education (DfE) of the apprentice's EPA results and the DfE issues the certificate which is sent to the employer address.

EPAOs will notify providers, employers, and apprentices of results, how this is done depends on the EPAO, so check how such results are issued.

How can PAL assist?

- PAL's resources include a detailed specification that outlines PAL's approach and interpretation of the relevant apprentice assessment plan
- PAL's website has links to all of PAL's relevant policies
- PAL's access to our assessment platform epaPRO means employers and providers can view their apprentice's progress during EPA
- PAL has dedicated email addresses for client EPA requests for information, support and enquiries and appeals
- PAL has a free phone number and voice mail that is available 24/7 for stakeholders to contact us if they have any questions regarding EPA
- PAL's EPA team will work with stakeholders to ensure they receive the information and briefings they need, in the format that works for them

Resits and retakes

Resits and retakes and any limiting grades are governed by the specific apprenticeship assessment plan. EPAOs/AOs will have a resit and retake policy, and training providers, employers and apprentices should familiarise themselves with these requirements. **A resit does not require further learning, whereas a retake does, this means an apprentice with a resit can take a subsequent assessment relatively quickly, whereas it is determined a retake would benefit the apprentice, there is an expectation they will receive further training for a period of at least one month.**

EPAOs/AOs will also stipulate in their service level contracts the fees for resits, retakes and cancelled assessments. Some EPAOs offer some free resits for on-line assessments, others charge a fixed fee for all reassessments and some charge the full assessment price. Generally, providers and employers should anticipate a reassessment fee to cover delivery requirements.

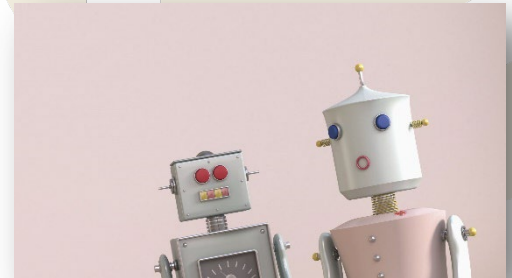
How can PAL assist?

- Standard fee for resits and retakes
- Resit and Retake Policy accessible via the website

Managing apprentices at the workplace - tips for employers and line managers of apprentices

Apprentices are individuals, so whilst they are expected to perform in a job and meet your business standards, they are also undertaking a funded training programme, and managing an apprentice, regardless of their experience or starting point, includes dedicated time for their training and development.

Take the time to read and familiarise yourself with the specific apprenticeship standard that your apprentice is enrolled in. This will give you a comprehensive understanding of the skills, knowledge, and behaviours they are expected to acquire throughout their apprenticeship. By doing so, you can align their learning and development activities with the requirements outlined in the standard.



It is imperative that apprentices understand their role within the organisation and know who they can ask for guidance and support. The requirement of the apprenticeship programme means they will need to learn new skills and acquire new knowledge; your on-job training role is vital to them meeting the required standards.

Training providers are there to support apprentices and employers, so engaging with the provider representative, participating in learning reviews and sharing your insights regarding the apprentice's progress and development needs, will make the off-job training better suited to your apprentice's needs and your business needs.

It is worth remembering that whilst apprenticeship standards relate to an occupational role, the Trailblazer composed standards expect apprentices to have a breadth of knowledge and awareness about the sector that supports employment transferability, so in some instances the apprentice will need to acquire knowledge beyond their immediate job role.

PAL appreciates not everyone learns in the same way and some of us need more motivation to revise for a test or complete a project. Checking in with your apprentice, asking about progress and offering general encouragement can make a difference.

With the practical insights and tips found in this handbook, you will be equipped to navigate the complexities of managing apprentices and unleash their full potential. Your investment in their development will not only benefit them but also contribute to the success of your team and organisation.

Key points for employers and line managers

- Set clear expectations for the apprentice's role, responsibilities, and goals. Discuss the apprentice's learning objectives and career aspirations and what you as a manager and employer want them to achieve
- If the apprentice is new to your organisation ensure they receive a comprehensive orientation to the workplace, including safety protocols. Introduce them to team members and key colleagues
- All apprentices, regardless of whether they are a known employee, or brand new to the workplace and world of work, should receive an induction into their apprenticeship. Whilst the provider will typically offer this as part of their service, the role of the manager and employer here is critical and demonstrating your support and understanding of the apprenticeship programme requirements from the outset gives your

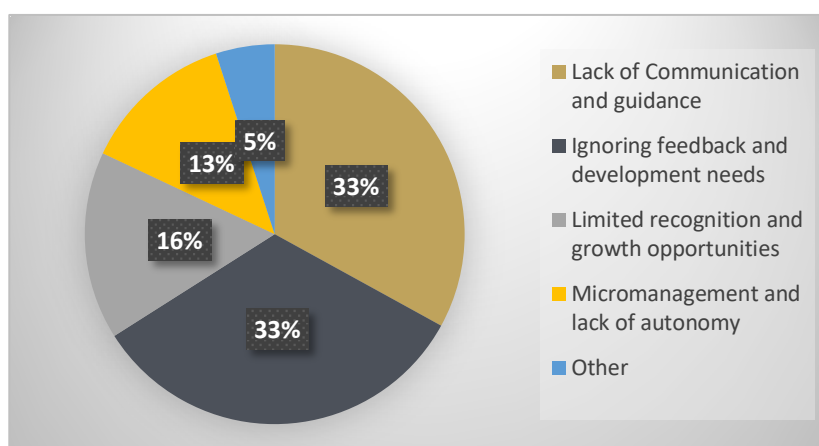
apprentice confidence, as they may be more comfortable about asking you for help with their learning, than the training provider representative in some cases

- If you can, assign an experienced employee to act as mentor or buddy to guide the apprentice, this can help the apprentice stay on track. As with any longer-term training commitment, an apprentice's enthusiasm and motivation can wax and wane, or juggling life, work and training can occasionally be a bit overwhelming and talking this through with someone can ease the pressure
- Offering training and development, this should be a given, however many apprentices who do not complete their apprenticeship programme frequently cite the lack of structured training in the workplace a reason for their leaving. As a good employer you will offer training to all your employees, make sure your apprentice has access to practical skills development, relevant training programmes, and workshops, and encourage your apprentice to seek out organisations such as the Association of Apprentices, that provide resources and the opportunity for your apprentice to network with other apprentices and access events and seminars run by the association
- Make sure your apprentice is available and attends their learning reviews, training sessions and practice assessments, they will help the apprentice get the best out of their programme. There will be occasions where it is necessary to change an appointment, make sure you or your apprentice inform the training provider so a new appointment can be made
- Offer constructive feedback on the apprentice's performance, emphasising both strengths and areas for improvement. Conduct regular check-ins to discuss progress and adjust goals as needed. Regularly evaluate the apprentice's overall performance and development. Use this information in discussion with the apprentice and training provider to modify the training programme if required
- As a manager you are busy, however making an appearance at learning reviews between the apprentice and training provider representative offers an excellent opportunity to make changes to the programme if required, get extra resources or support for the apprentice if necessary and ensure the programme is meeting your expectations and needs
- The training provider will agree a learning plan with you and the apprentice, this plan can be reviewed, and the goals should be realistic, whilst providing the apprentice with opportunities to grow and develop in their role. Your input regarding skills development and how the apprentice is performing in their role are essential to a meaningful learning plan for the apprentice and a workable programme for you and your organisation

Communication is everything

The Association of Apprenticeships undertook a survey of their apprenticeship members and asked the question:

“What is the most detrimental way that a line manager can impede your progress on your apprenticeship path?”



How can PAL assist?

- PAL's clients have access to the relevant apprenticeship standard Padlet (on-line resources) that provide access to a range of resources and links, which includes the apprenticeship standard assessment plan
- PAL provides practice assessment materials
- PAL's resources include a detailed specification that outlines PAL's approach and interpretation of the relevant apprentice assessment plan
- PAL's website has links to all of PAL's relevant policies
- PAL's access to our assessment platform epaPRO, means employers and providers can view their apprentice's progress during EPA
- PAL has dedicated email addresses for clients EPA requests for information, support and enquiries and appeals
- PAL has a free phone number and voice mail that is available 24/7 for stakeholders to contact us if they have any questions regarding EPA
- PAL's EPA team will work with stakeholders to ensure they receive the information and briefings they need, in the format that works for them
- Access to a dedicated account manager, who can arrange training sessions and support meetings on request

Training providers/colleges - tips for preparing apprentices for their EPA

Training providers and colleges have a pivotal role in developing apprentices and this guide is not intended to offer information regarding curriculum development or how to organise an effective training programme.

Experience of EPA indicates that introducing and using EPA assessment preparation materials early in the apprentice's journey takes away some of the anxieties and uncertainty individuals may have. Providers and EPAOs that take a partnership approach to supporting apprentices and employers and share good practice are better placed to make the apprentice's experience of the entire apprenticeship programme a positive one.

Partnership working can also extend to providers and EPAOs reviewing forecasts for apprentices entering gateway, this helps avoid lengthy delays to an apprentice commencing their EPA.

It is vital that all parties are familiar with the relevant standard, assessment plan and version of that plan. The EPAO should be able to guide you here, alternatively visit the Skills England/IfATE website and you can access the information there.



Setting up apprentices for success in their EPA should be everyone's endgame, training providers/colleges, in addition to utilising their resources, should ask and expect the following from the selected EPAO/AO:

- Additional support materials, such as fact sheets and standard specifications
- Practice assessment materials
- Access to a scheduling system that tracks each of their apprentice's EPA progress from registration to certification
- Access to an account manager and personnel able to support with EPA enquiries
- Clearly defined service level contracts with a simple fee and pricing structure to include the treatment for cancellations, resits and retakes
- EPA guidance available in a range of formats, which is updated and refreshed when standards or assessment plans are revised
- Support for provider personnel, which can include training in how to use systems, and clarification regarding EPAO's policies and procedures
- Gateway requirements and how evidence to support EPA can be submitted
- Invigilation policies and procedures and approaches regarding remote and/or virtual assessment
- Access to a reasonable adjustment policy and guidance, which describes how to request such adjustments, proof required and examples of interventions
- Information regarding average EPA turnaround times and required lead in times to organise timely end-point assessments
- Information regarding how results are communicated, timelines and report formats

Practice or mock assessments are highly beneficial and ideally should be built into the apprentice's programme of learning, the best form of practice assessments replicate the actual EPA in terms of challenge and timings. End-point assessment is a high stakes assessment and can be nerve racking, so practice assessments can also address areas such as dealing with assessment nerves and revision techniques, as well as practicing activities such as delivering a presentation, where appropriate.

How can PAL assist?

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Apprentices - tips for preparing for EPA

An apprenticeship is not something that is done to you, as an apprentice you should be fully involved in your apprenticeship and whilst your employer and training provider are there to provide you with learning opportunities and support and guidance, your input helps them to deliver a programme that best fits you.

Starting on an apprenticeship can seem a little bit mind-blowing, as you come to terms with the apprenticeship standards, qualification requirements and terminology that maybe new to you.

One of the things you should always be able to do, is to ask questions of your provider or employer if you don't understand what is expected from you or need clarification regarding any instructions provided. If you are struggling to meet training and work requirements, the best thing to do, is to talk with your provider and employer, they are there to help. If your programme is not what you expect, have an open and honest dialogue with your employer and provider and if you need extra help with learning things, completing assignments or projects ask for that help.



Anyone working with apprenticeship standards should know what knowledge, skills, and behaviour requirements form part of the relevant apprenticeship standard, so having a copy of the assessment plan will help you navigate your way through the apprenticeship programme and EPA.

Training providers and EPAOs do provide resources and materials designed to help you get the best out of the apprenticeship programme, as an apprentice you should know how to access these resources.

An earlier section of this guide explains some of the important stages of the apprenticeship and as an apprentice it is useful to know what you can do, to make each stage work for you.

Initial assessment and on-boarding

Initial assessments can take several forms ranging from a discussion to a comprehensive diagnostic assessment, it is important to remember the purpose of these assessments is to find out about you, how and what you need to learn, what will work best for you and what your starting point is.

On-boarding or induction into the programme will tell you how your programme will look and should make clear roles and responsibilities and what is expected of you. Importantly this stage of your programme is your opportunity to ask questions, and there should be no such thing as a stupid question. If you don't understand the terminology or acronyms people are using, ask what they are, for example KSBs are talked about a lot, do you know what they are?

On-programme learning

Your training provider and employer have a responsibility to provide you with credible, relevant, and good quality training - as an apprentice, your responsibility is to make the most of these opportunities and resources. This means being ready and open to learning new skills, being accountable for completing learning activities that are geared to your development, undertaking revision for tests where required and being a good team member and turning up for learning reviews with your provider.

End-point assessment is a high stakes assessment, but it is worth remembering your employer, provider and EPAO want you to succeed and doing well in your EPA is helped by doing practice assessments, which normally will be facilitated by your training provider during your programme.



Gateway

Gateway is the stage of the apprenticeship programme that determines the apprentice's readiness for end-point assessment. The relevant assessment plan and EPAO will explain what evidence is required and, whilst your employer and provider need to confirm you meet the KSB criteria, it is **your** EPA, so you need to be confident about progressing to this stage.

Assessment planning

Most EPAOs will plan the EPA with the apprentice and employer to ensure things such as the location, timing and date of assessments, resources required, assessment conditions and assessment duration.

If reasonable adjustments have been applied for on your behalf, the EPAO representative will confirm the requirements and how the assessment will be adjusted.

For an apprentice, this is your opportunity to ask any questions you have about the end-point assessment, hopefully you will have accessed the EPAO's resources and information, whether you have or not, the EPAO will be willing to answer your questions.

Apprentices should leave an assessment planning meeting knowing about the assessment requirements, assessment dates and timings, how the assessment will be conducted, evidence authentication, what to do if you wish to complain or challenge the assessment outcomes, equipment required and suitability of the assessment environment. If this information is not provided, then ask.

End-point assessment

The nature of the end-point assessment is determined by the assessment plan and it is important to remember that the assessments are impartial, independent and you will not get immediate feedback on how you have done or performed, immediately after each assessment.

Results

EPAOs may vary slightly on how the results are issued and who they are issued to, so if this information is not clear, ask. Typically results should be issued within 15 working days of the final assessment.

Assessment reports are issued but it is important to remember test result scripts or assessment recordings will not be shared with you, as this will constitute an assessment confidentiality breach.



Top Tip!

Ask questions if you are unsure about any aspect of your programme and make sure you read and understand the apprenticeship standard and assessment plan you are working with.

How can PAL assist?

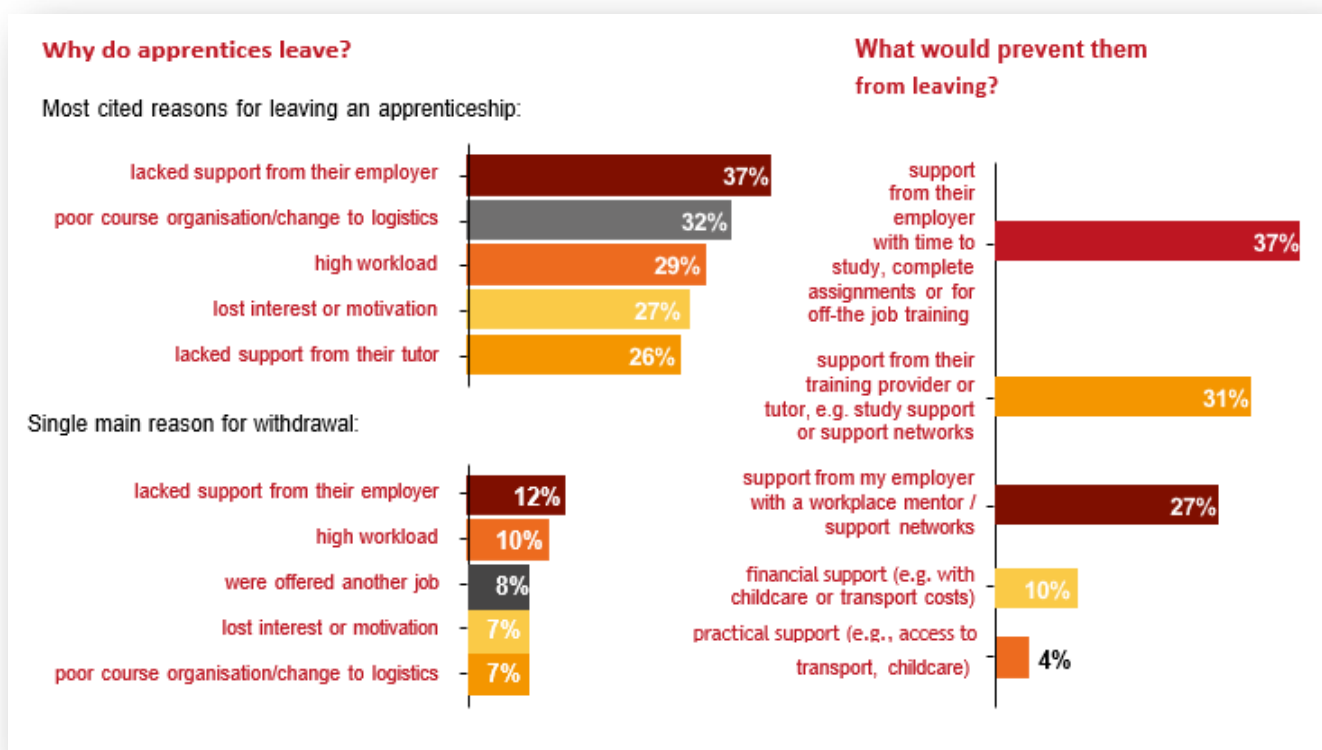
- For every apprenticeship standard PAL assesses there is an easy to use, informative Padlet (on-line resource) that contains all the information you need to help you prepare for your end-point assessment

An apprenticeship is a more of a marathon than a sprint - dealing with the challenges

Whilst the benefits of training and earning, without the responsibility of fees or loans are many, work-life balance can become trickier to manage, when making time for learning, revision, and assessment preparation has to be factored into a daily schedule.

As apprenticeship programmes can last from one to five years it is unsurprising that motivation towards the programme can peak and trough. Self-motivation and self-management of learning are qualities that an apprentice needs to hone, but it is worth remembering that managers and training provider/college personnel can help an apprentice recognise and address the common challenges to them successfully completing their apprenticeship.

Why do apprentices leave their programme early?



This section of the guide looks at some of the common challenges faced by apprentices based on the research undertaken by the St Martin's Group² Apprenticeship and Destination research undertaken in 2023³ and looks at interventions that can help an apprentice reach the finish line.

² <https://stmartinsgroup.org/>

³ <https://stmartinsgroup.org/apprenticeship-outcomes-and-destinations/>

Challenge 1 - apprentices losing motivation or drifting off track

As already noted, the apprenticeship programme requires long-term commitment from all invested parties and with many competing priorities, an apprentice may lose interest, or if some of the programme elements are challenging, and they don't understand what is required of them, this can adversely impact on their confidence.

Apprentices in many cases do not attend group training, nor are they part of a year group or cohesive cohort of learners, so they don't have the opportunity to discuss their ideas or approach to training tasks with other learners.

Lack of motivation is reported as one of the factors in apprentices leaving programmes. The St Martin's Group Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destination research found that just over a quarter of respondents who withdrew from their programme reported a 'loss of interest or motivation'.

The solution

Schedule in regular, well-structured review meetings encouraging open and honest conversations at work and with the training provider/college representative/and/or tutor.

The St Martin's Group report also found that regular meetings with providers and one-to-ones with line managers are one of the most valuable forms of support for apprentices, so whilst training resources and materials and a well-thought-out curriculum are essential, regular communication and where are we at catchups have a significant impact on apprenticeship completions.

It is not always possible for the apprentice's line manager to be present for all the reviews involving the apprentice's tutor (training provider/college trainer). However, where the apprentice's manager does contribute, the resulting learning programme becomes more tailored for the apprentice and the business and supports the apprentice's programme progression.

Apprentices can be de-motivated by elements of the programme, this might be due to the content, timing of training or the format of training, encourage apprentices to feedback on their learning experiences and if they are finding any aspect of the programme overly challenging consider if there are some different options to disseminating information.

Where an apprentice does not have access to other learners also undertaking an apprenticeship, joining an association such as the Association of Apprenticeships (AoA) can provide a sense of community, as well as networking opportunities. AoA membership also means the apprentice can obtain additional resources that will help them with their apprenticeship.



How a learning review is structured will vary depending on the training provider/college approach and additionally the review may be influenced by the apprenticeship standard, the apprentice's location of work and whether the review is a face-to face review or a remote review. If they are remote, try to ensure you all have your cameras on and that the apprentice can use the specific webinar platform.

Normally reviews can take place between 4-12 weeks, 4-6 weeks tends to work better, and a review agenda should typically cover the following:

- Progress to date regarding knowledge, skills, and behaviour attainment as required by the apprenticeship standard and role functionality
- Recognition of positive performance, as well as identifying areas for development
- Addressing questions from the apprentice and line manager/employer
- Setting out tangible next steps so that the apprentice knows where they should be by the next review and have a clear goal in mind

- Scheduling in EPA touchpoints, whether that's mini-knowledge tests or reviewing practice assessment materials, as provided by the assigned EPAO to help keep that ultimate goal at the forefront
- A check in with the apprentice to cover wellbeing and welfare, discussing any challenges they may be facing so that they can address issues early on, with the support of their line manager (employer) and training provider/college

Involvement from the employer in these sessions ensures that everyone is on the same page and validates the apprentice's progress.

If as an employer you cannot be present at these meetings, it is worth having scheduled catch-up meetings with the apprentice, to go through their reviews and if you wish to discuss any aspect of the programme, make sure you have the correct contact details of your apprentice's trainer/tutor so you can contact them directly.

Outside of the review meetings, it helps if all parties know how they can contact each other, to include availability and the optimum way to get hold of the concerned individual.

Creating a strong foundation for learning - how can the employer/manager do this?

A manager's role is crucial in creating a positive and supportive environment that sets the foundation for their success. In some cases, the apprentice will be an existing employee and familiar with the workplace, however it is worth setting out expectations of the apprenticeship programme and support arrangements, as well as notifying others in the workplace of the apprentice's programme.



If the apprentice is new to the workplace, and this might also be their first experience of full-time working, by following a few key tips, a manager can ensure a smooth and effective induction process, helping your apprentice integrate into the team. By implementing these strategies, you can lay the groundwork for a successful apprenticeship programme and foster a culture of growth and development within your organisation.

- Involve the team
- Welcome the apprentice to the team (this is for new apprentices) but make sure if the apprentice is an existing employee, colleagues are aware of their programme
- Offer inductions on health & safety, data protection, company values and role requirements, break times, shift times, sickness reporting and dress code. Even if the apprentice is a current employee, a refresher covering some of these areas might be useful in support of evidence collection and meeting the requisite KSBs
- Set clear expectations regarding the job role and training and development commitments
- Don't make assumptions about their capabilities, even if the apprentice is known to you, there may be elements of the apprenticeship programme that are new to them and for some getting back into the learning habit can take time

- Encourage responsibility, whilst the training provider/college and employer have to provide training opportunities, the apprentice needs to take an active role in their learning, which includes timely completion of tasks and asking for help if required and making the best use of the time given to them to complete their training
- Build in catch-up times - these do not have to be long, and the frequency may have to be determined according to the apprentice's experience and confidence. Recognise success and milestone achievements and address any concerns or falling behind on programme as they arise
- Assigning a mentor is not always possible, especially in smaller businesses, however assigning a trusted staff member as their work-place mentor or buddy for support, can take some of the pressure off the manager and help the apprentice to develop their learning network within the business
- Make sure the apprentice has access to the necessary equipment, resources, uniform, and workspace

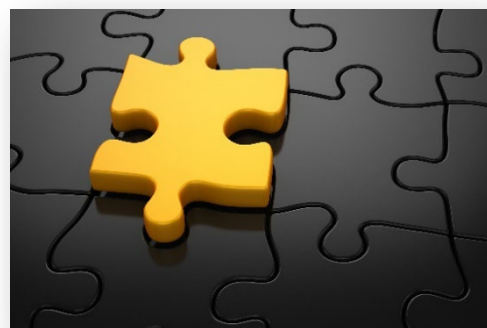
Challenge 2 - delays to programme timelines caused by gaps in core KSBs

There are multiple factors that can slow down an apprentice's progress towards their end goal, but one of the main causes is not being in the best job to meet the needs of their apprenticeship standard.

Sometimes apprentices are put on standards that appear to match the role, but the day-to-day tasks don't meet the KSBs required for EPA. Other times, roles evolve or shift focus, taking an apprentice off in another direction. This can lead to skills gaps and delay the apprentice building up the right evidence they need to succeed.

In addition to job role and standards misalignment, it is important that all parties at the start of an apprenticeship programme, check which version of the assessment plan the apprentice is working on.

Sometimes there are only minor changes between one version of an assessment plan and the next, but in some instances, both the KSBs and assessment methods may significantly differ.



The solution

Double check the assessment plan version number with the training provider and EPAO, this version number should be replicated on the provider's learning management system and the EPAO's registration and assessment scheduling system.

The employer and training provider ideally should review the apprentice's job description against the apprenticeship standard KSBs. If there are a few gaps at programme commencement, consider and confirm that the apprentice's role can extend to cover these KSBs.

An apprenticeship programme should offer an apprentice the necessary stretch and challenge, so it is not an issue if at programme commencement the apprentice's role is not covering all the KSBs, this is with the proviso that during the programme duration, the apprentice will have the opportunity to cover them, and this should be discussed and noted by all parties.

Reviews and check-ins need to review the apprentice's performance against the KSBs, any concerns or gaps should be addressed with the apprentice, employer, and provider. At the check-ins or reviews the provider and employer should evaluate skills development against the requirements of their standard; alongside skills development, evidence collection should confirm knowledge and behaviours development.

Also use these moments to check whether your apprentices are developing soft skills that they will need for EPA – for example, presentation skills or time management skills to help them balance work and study for a smoother

journey. Identify how you can support them to broaden their skills set and add any relevant steps into their learning plans. These extra checks can also aid the apprentice in obtaining higher grades in their EPA.

If the apprentice is missing milestones or falling behind, it is vital that an honest discussion is had between the apprentice, employer/line manager and training provider/college representative. The conversation may lead to altered timescales, alternative methods of delivery, or further practice assessments. In some instances, it may be that the apprentice has come to the end of their journey and continuing with the apprenticeship is not a realistic option, in which case it is important to reflect on their learning and recognise their achievements.

Where an apprentice moves to a different employer or fundamentally changes their role, there is a decision to be made by the apprentice. If they wish to continue with an apprenticeship they will need to talk with their employer and provider/college as how they can best execute this. It is important to recognise that a change in standard will require further periods of learning.

Changing to a different standard may mean that a new provider/college or EPAO must be assigned, as the original stakeholders do not deliver training for the new standard. Where new stakeholders must be engaged it pays to find out about the apprenticeship funding rules implications and the existing provider, or the Apprenticeship Service or organisations such as Professional Assessment Ltd Audit and Compliance team can provide help and guidance here.

Some assessment plans have different pathways, if it is the case the apprentice needs to change pathway, then subject to the employer and provider agreeing a new course of action, the assigned EPAO in most cases can amend the apprentice registration and convert them to a different pathway.

It is worth noting that if there are any changes to the apprentice's programme, timelines or changing of standards, the EPAO needs to be notified, so they can support accordingly.

In February 2025, the proposal of shorter apprenticeships (minimum duration 8 months) and the concept of using Recognition of Prior Learning were part of the Apprenticeship principles proposals and these subject to final parliamentary approval will be introduced in August 2025.

Challenge 3 - hold-ups reaching gateway linked to late planning for mandatory qualifications and reasonable adjustments

Note for many as of February 2025 the requirement to pass functional skills tests have been removed, however this does not apply to those apprentices who were under the age of 19 at the start of their apprenticeship.

Where an assessment plan includes the requirement of a stated mandatory or mandated qualification, prior to entering gateway, the EPAO will need to see attributable evidence that this qualification has been achieved. Personal Learning Records (PLRs) can be utilised to support gateway validation, but ideally this should be followed up with certificated evidence wherever possible.

If ATE introduced in August 2023 a new approach to the assessment of mandated qualifications **(for some standards and assessment plans)**, these changes will be reflected in new assessment plans, where the relevant Trailblazer group has confirmed they want a mandated qualification as part of the apprenticeship and there are acceptable qualifications available. If you are not sure whether your apprenticeship requires you to have any additional qualifications, please check with your provider/college representative or ask your EPAO/AO.

Up until 2023 if a standard had a mandated qualification, this qualification was achieved and certificated prior to gateway, the new approach is a final element of the qualification will now be assessed as part of the EPA and the qualification certificate will not be available until after the EPA completion. **Note this only applies to some and not all assessment plans.**

The new approach means an element of the mandated qualification will be assessed in the EPA, it will take place

after other EPA activities, and the qualification certificate will not be available until after the conclusion of all the other elements of the EPA.

Integration of mandated qualifications to EPA will mean that providers, employers, and apprentices may have to deal with one organisation undertaking the EPA for the non-qualification aspects of the assessment plan and another organisation will undertake the qualification assessment in EPA. Your assigned EPAO should be able to guide you through this new process.

If you need to apply for reasonable adjustments for the EPA, talk to the EPAO and they will take you through their procedures and policies. Some EPAOs have a [Cognassist](#) recognition, which demonstrates their awareness to recognising a broad range of reasonable adjustment requests and confirms they will consider the Cognassist diagnostic report, if the training provider uses them as part of their screening process.

The solution

Although gateway and EPA might seem far off at the beginning of your apprentice's journey, consider key milestones and evidence requirements as specified by the relevant assessment plan and EPAO. Most EPAOs will let the training provider upload the relevant evidence as and when it is available.

EPAOs will have standard specifications, training providers/colleges and employers should read these, as they will specify what evidence is required for gateway. Additionally, EPAOs will have detailed policies which should be available via their EPA portal or website. These policies, as for example with reasonable adjustments, will detail their expectations, and what and when they require evidence to support a reasonable adjustment application.



Regarding reasonable adjustments the EPAO will expect to know how such adjustments have been applied in the workplace and that the apprentice can still fulfil the job role in line with the pertinent KSBs and industry expectations.

Requests for reasonable adjustments should ideally be made before the gateway review. Where such requests are complex and require a range of adjustments, such discussions should be had with the EPAO in advance of the forecasted gateway date to ensure the needs of the apprentice are one fully understood and secondly can be met.

If there is uncertainty regarding what an EPAO expects as suitable evidence regarding reasonable adjustments, talk to them directly.

Challenge 4 - apprentices feeling under confident or not fully prepared for their EPA

EPA is a crucial part of the apprenticeship journey, determining the ultimate success of the programme delivery and notably the apprentice's competence. EPA is high stakes assessment, with the concept of mastery intrinsic in the assessment design, this means the apprentice must be able to meet all the KSBs and pass all the assessment components at the pass level dictated by the assessment plan and developed by the EPAO.



In a previous section of this guide, we explored ways you can help improve your apprentice's EPA-readiness with targeted reviewing during the on-programme learning journey – from making sure they are hitting all the KSBs to ensuring they have all the necessary evidence to support the gateway submission.

Apprentices lacking confidence or feeling under-prepared on the EPA day, or nervous about the assessment are features that providers and employers need to be on the watch for. As with all assessments, some EPA anxiety is natural, but this can spiral if apprentices are not practically or emotionally prepared with an idea of what to expect on the day or days. Severe anxiety or stress can have an impact on the apprentice's well-being and mental health and most likely reduce their chances of performing to their best ability both at work and during formal assessments.

It is worth noting that the independent assessor will typically ask apprentices if they are happy to proceed with their assessment and interventions such as assessment planning and re-confirming the EPA activities at the beginning of an end-point assessment are designed to check that apprentice feels they are sufficiently prepared. Even with these precautions there will be times where nerves get the better of an apprentice in the assessment and whilst the independent assessor will be as supportive as they can be, they have strict protocols to follow and the EPAO must ensure that assessments are fair and consistent across all apprentices.

There is no silver bullet regarding assessment readiness, however PAL's experience of assessing apprentices, is those that have had the opportunity to practice the requirements of their assessment are likely to perform better than those apprentices who have been inadequately prepared for this element of the programme by their employer and training provider.

The solution

Schedule in mock/practice assessments to help manage expectations and engage with your EPAO early on to make sure you have all their resources and support materials. EPAOs will also provide briefings for employers and providers, so make sure you take advantage of all the support they can provide.

EPA looks very different for each standard with a mix of assessment methods including knowledge tests, presentations, professional discussions, and observation in the workplace. As with any assessment, to make sure learners feel prepared and confident, practice makes perfect.

Practice/mock assessments can give learners a feel of how their EPA will take shape. They are also an opportunity to identify and feedback on areas that are particularly strong, as well as areas where more work is needed. It is worth remembering that independent assessors are not able to provide developmental feedback or provide any form of coaching during the EPA itself, but employers and training providers can provide practice assessments with formative feedback.

There are no fixed rules regarding how many mock assessments an apprentice needs, this in part will depend on their levels of confidence with specific assessment methods. In PAL's experience, many apprentices are not big fans of tests, and assessments involving presentations and projects appear to offer the most challenge. You can also add mini-knowledge tests, even if the apprenticeship assessment plan they are working on does not involve a test, testing does help with memory and recall, which are necessary for knowledge development.

Recording an apprentice in a mock presentation, interview, or professional discussion (accepting very few of us like to listen or watch ourselves in such a situation), can be very beneficial to the apprentice, as they can critique how they perform and as an employer or tutor you can highlight areas of good performance and what made them good, and areas of development and how to improve this aspect of the assessment.

Many EPAOs will administer on-line tests with remote invigilation or proctoring, make sure apprentices are familiar with testing in this format.

If an apprentice is required to deliver a presentation, try to find opportunities for them to present information at work, this can include presenting to colleagues at a team meeting or briefings.

For remote assessment, make sure the apprentice is familiar with the relevant platform, so for example if the EPAO uses MS Teams and the apprentice has only used Google Hangouts, make sure any practice/mock assessment is undertaken using the MS Teams.

Practice assessments help confirm readiness at the gateway review and whilst it is impossible to know how an apprentice will perform in EPA, practice assessments provide an indication of the potential outcomes.

Challenge 5 - uncertainty about what to do at EPA

Even with a good number of practice tests under their belt, and the gateway review, validated by the EPAO, the apprentice may still be a little unclear as to exactly what will happen at their end-point assessment. This can create a range of problems including lost time, difficult test conditions, or needing to delay the event altogether, as the assessment environment is unsuitable or does not meet the conditions as specified in the assessment plan.

The solution

The majority of EPAOs will plan the assessments with the apprentice and employer. Planning will include times and dates for the assessment methods that are required by the relevant assessment plan, and best fits with the apprentice and the business. Assessment plans also set an assessment window, these do vary across standards and the independent assessor will ensure the assessment is scheduled to comply with the assessment window.

The purpose of the assessment planning meeting is to confirm the assessment requirements and ensure the apprentice is ready for the assessment and has access to resources, equipment and facilities that are needed.

The independent assessor will reiterate the importance of assessment (test) conditions, the format of assessment, for example, whether the assessment is on-site, at a specified venue or remote. If the assessment environment required must be sterile, this will be reaffirmed and if the presence of others in an assessment such as a professional discussion is needed, this will be planned for.

Observations and practical assessments typically want the apprentice to demonstrate how they undertake tasks in normal working conditions; where such assessments rely on footfall for example the independent assessor will want to check that the time selected for the assessment affords the apprentice the opportunity to best showcase their skills.

Where evidence must be made available to the independent assessor prior to the assessment, arrangements for how such work will be shared will be discussed and agreed.

For on-site assessments, the independent assessor will wish to confirm any site arrangements and requirements in respect of security, access and health and safety.

The independent assessor will also advise the apprentice of things such as appeals and enquiries, maladministration and malpractice and the importance of authenticating evidence.

If reasonable adjustments have been agreed upon, the independent assessor will reconfirm any arrangements.

Most assessment planning meetings will be undertaken remotely, and it is recommended the apprentice's line manager is present. The training provider's presence is not required at assessment planning meetings.

At the end of an assessment planning meeting the apprentice should know what is expected of them and how each assessment component will be conducted.

Top tips for preparing for end-point assessment

Assessments come in a range of formats, ranging from observation to professional discussions and apprenticeship assessments can include anything from two to five individual assessment components. In addition to the specific apprenticeship assessment plan, your EPAO will have a standard specification and further detailed information to aid understanding of how to address the different assessment components and get the most out of the assessment method.

IfATE have produced a [video](#)⁴ that provides a top line summary for the key assessment methods. Note this video may be retired with the introduction of Skills England.

Assessment Method	Top Tips
<p>Observation</p> <p>Observation is an effective assessment method for ‘assessing’ skills and behaviours. Observation can be of natural working practice or be an observation of a timed skills challenge or simulation.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refer to the assessment plan and assessment planning meeting to be clear about what the independent assessor will wish to see ➤ Check timings and advise colleagues of the assessment ➤ For observations of natural work performance, if the assessment includes an assessment of client/customer or colleague interaction, in the case of clients and colleagues inform them of your assessment. If an observation relies on you working with customers, make sure that the time selected for the assessment will ensure customer presence ➤ Practice the assessment as far as you can and get feedback from others highlighting areas of strength and areas of development ➤ On the day of the assessment, focus on the tasks you have to complete and try and forget about the independent assessor’s presence. If things don’t go quite as planned, don’t panic, how you react to an unforeseen situation may be a positive contribution to your EPA ➤ Don’t forget the basics such as personal hygiene, health and safety, and where appropriate correct use of PPE, equipment, and manual handling and COSHH ➤ Keep an eye on the time, if you have a time sheet or task list for the assessment, stick with that. The independent assessor will confirm when the assessment starts and may give you some time checks ➤ If an observation is split over different times or locations on the same day, the independent assessor may require you to remain in their presence and they will not want you to talk to others about your assessment
<p>Professional Discussion (PD)</p> <p>A professional discussion is a planned, timed, and structured two-way conversation typically between the independent assessor and apprentice (note some standards and plans require the presence of an employer representative). Professional discussions tend to be structured around supporting evidence such as a portfolio, which is reviewed but not assessed, or is</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refer to the assessment plan, it will describe which KSBs are to be covered by this assessment method and this information is your agenda ➤ Check the timings for the assessment, also look for the number of questions the independent assessor can ask, (newer assessment plans detail the number of questions) and questions will be framed around the assigned KSBs ➤ Check if the assessment plan allows you to bring in notes, supporting evidence, portfolios, if it does, top tip have them to hand ➤ Check the assessment environment, you should be in a quiet room where you will not be disturbed or interrupted (this is a formal assessment) and if it is a remote assessment, the independent assessor will ask you to scan the room and switch notifications off on your computer or laptop

⁴ <https://youtu.be/57uWc6EDjKw?si=Ei0ZT52qxZOQlyPl>

Assessment Method	Top Tips
<p>a follow up to other assessments such as a project or presentation which are assessed separately. As an assessment technique the PD is an effective tool to assess behaviours, soft skills, and applied knowledge, whilst amplifying real events the apprentice has been involved in.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Make sure if you have notes or a portfolio, you are familiar with the content and know how to quickly find information, accurate referencing if using a portfolio and a logical structure will assist here. Remember even if a portfolio is not formally assessed, but reviewed, the independent assessor uses this review to inform their questions ➤ This is your opportunity as an apprentice to describe your best examples of evidence that are relevant to the KSBs being assessed - don't waste time covering KSBs that are covered by another assessment method ➤ Use real examples of situations, the independent assessor wants to know what you did, not what you would do. Do not use work examples that pre-date your apprenticeship start date, as such evidence may lack currency and provides challenges for validation ➤ The PD is all about you the apprentice, use the pronouns 'I' and 'me', as opposed to 'we' and 'us'. The independent assessor understands you work as part of a team or unit and that using the collective can be natural conversation, but they need to be sure of what you did ➤ Listen to the independent assessor's questions, if you are asked to give one example, give one example. If you don't understand the question, let the independent assessor know. Don't be rushed into making a response, take your time, if you need to refer to your notes or portfolio or other evidence do so ➤ PDs are asking for examples of what you did, so state what you did, what the impact of your actions were on you, your team, the business and the results of your actions and any reflections you have because of what took place ➤ Don't panic or get frustrated if you don't think you have given a great response, the independent assessor will typically ask you (within specified timescales) if you have anything else to share with them ➤ Listen to prompts (the independent assessor cannot provide many) but for example if you use 'we', they may well ask you to say what you did and use 'I' ➤ Many assessment plans mean the independent assessor must ask questions that will address pass and distinction grades, if you don't answer a question that well, it does not necessarily mean you have failed the assessment ➤ Timings are key, many assessment plans will allow a specified extra time for questions, but if you answer all the questions in less time than specified you will be required to sit the assessment out until the minimum time is met ➤ If an employer presence is required in a PD, make sure they can attend, if they are not available the chances are the assessment will have to be rescheduled ➤ Practice the PD on-programme, making sure the agenda is aligned to the relevant KSBs and if the assessment is remote - undertake the PD in this fashion
<p>Presentation</p> <p>A presentation is a planned and timed formal presentation, typically followed by a question and answer session. Presentations are linked to a work-place event which has either been recorded in</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Refer to the assessment plan, it will describe which KSBs are to be covered by this assessment method, use this information to structure your presentation and map any supporting evidence, so you know what you are presenting is covering the right KSBs ➤ Check the timings for the assessment, also look for the number of questions the independent assessor can ask, (some assessment plans detail the number of questions) and questions will be framed around the assigned KSBs

Assessment Method	Top Tips
<p>a portfolio or a project. Presentations are effective at assessing communication skills and the apprentice's ability to analyse and evaluate information and data. Typically, the presentation is delivered to the independent assessor, where the assessment plan requires the presence of others, as part of a panel, such persons must be present.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ In line with assessment plan, check what information if any the independent assessor requires before the presentation and check if there is a specific presentation requirement, i.e., the presentation requires PowerPoint ➤ In the presentation make it clear what the purpose of the presentation is, what information and activities it is referring to. Have a simple introduction, main body and conclusions and recommendations ➤ If using PowerPoint or similar programme, use company branded slides if appropriate and keep the slides simple. Avoid using the slide content as prompts or reading off the slides ad verbatim. Avoid having too many slides. If the assessment plan does not require you to use PowerPoint, consider other options for presenting your information if you are more comfortable doing this ➤ Ensure you are in an appropriate assessment environment, free from interruptions and if the assessment is remote, you will be asked to do a room check ➤ Tell the independent assessor what you have done, avoid hypothetical scenarios, this is about you the apprentice showcasing your skills ➤ Practice the presentation and consider the possible questions an independent assessor may ask you, based on the KSBs allocated to this assessment method
<p>Project</p> <p>A project is an assessment method that typically demonstrates how an apprentice has solved a genuine business problem. In many cases this assessment format will require a project proposal and a written project.</p> <p>Projects can be found in all levels of assessment, however normally they are geared to higher levels of standards, as they should be a discrete and complex piece of work. Where they are required for a level 2 standard for example, the assessment process matches the demand for assessment.</p> <p>Projects are particularly effective in assessing KSBs that involve research, analysis, collaboration with others, implementing change, leadership and facilitation of tasks, and project management. This assessment method pays to get it right, first time as a re-assessment may require a new project depending on the assessment plan.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Read the assessment plan and EPAO guidance so you know which KSBs the project is designed to cover and determine if it is a singular piece of evidence or supporting another assessment method ➤ Check out the format for the project and the word count criteria - under or over the requirement will mean the project may be failed or the independent assessor will only assess to the maximum word count ➤ Where the project must be completed in the EPA window it is vital the apprentice is given the necessary time to compile it. If the project requires the signing off a project proposal, make sure you know the timings of the proposal submission and project submission ➤ Make it evident to the independent assessor what the project scope and objectives are, who are the involved stakeholders, the rationale for the research and challenges and obstacles faced in the work associated with the project ➤ Clarify what the desired outcomes of the project are and describe how the project met its original goals and outcomes, and include your evaluation, how well the project meet its goals, what went well, what you might do differently, what you had to amend and why. Remember the project must fit with the initial discussion and agreement with the independent assessor, so if the project parameters fundamentally change you will need to advise the EPAO ➤ Map the project content to the relevant KSBs so you know you have met the requisite KSBs ➤ Reference your research resources ➤ Appendices or supporting evidence (which sit outside of the word count) should be signposted in the main project and kept to a minimum but can include product evidence – subject to GDPR and permissions and appropriate redaction; risk management considerations; stakeholder engagement; reporting and communication; policies or regulations followed, and relevant internal processes and procedures followed ➤ Provide a glossary of terms and acronyms

Assessment Method	Top Tips
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Remember the independent assessor is not typically familiar with your organisation, so provide some context of the organisation, roles, and responsibilities, this can be included as supporting evidence ➤ Have a contents table and use clear headings within the project report ➤ If the project is assessed alongside a presentation or interview, make sure you have access to your project in these assessments
<p>Tests</p> <p>Tests can be in the form of multiple-choice questions, situational judgement tests or written tests. Typically, these tests are available online using the EPAO's preferred test platform. Paper-based tests are not necessarily available from every EPAO, so check with them. Tests are particularly useful for assessing knowledge.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Review the assessment plan to confirm the format of the test, the number of questions and time for the allowed for the test ➤ Check out the invigilation requirements with the EPAO - all tests must be undertaken in a satisfactory test environment ➤ If you have applied for reasonable adjustments, confirm with the EPAO these arrangements, and check out the availability of technology such as screen readers ➤ Read the assessment plan and EPAO's specification to determine the pass marks for the test and the test structure, for example, are you expected to pass individual sections within the test, are there certain questions/topics you must get right, to gain a pass ➤ Complete practice tests, your EPAO should be able to provide practice questions ➤ Revise
<p>Portfolio</p> <p>In newer assessment plans portfolios usually are not assessed, but they are reviewed and will inform the associated assessment method, typically an interview or professional discussion. Even if portfolios are not formally assessed the principles of evidence presentation i.e., presenting evidence that is valid, authentic, current, sufficient, and relevant still apply.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Number your evidence consistently and have a contents page ➤ Map your evidence accurately to the KSBs - it is very unlikely one piece of evidence will cover all the KSBs associated with the underpinning portfolio and aligned assessment method ➤ Read the assessment plan and EPAO specification to ensure your portfolio evidence aligns to the number of pieces of evidence you can have and the type of evidence ➤ Provide context statements for evidence ➤ Work or product evidence may need to be redacted in places, make sure this is done and ensure such evidence is validated ➤ Note the EPAO's requirement for evidence authentication and the consequences for presenting evidence that is irrelevant or not attributable to you (the apprentice) ➤ Avoid excessive use of audio recordings of evidence, particularly where there is no supporting or validating evidence ➤ Observations, witness testimonies, work products and on-programme recorded professional discussions alongside knowledge statements may be acceptable. Note assessment plans make clear what type of evidence is acceptable and, in many cases, reflective accounts and statements are not acceptable. ➤ All portfolio evidence should be examples of your involvement in real activities, avoiding hypothetical statements of what you might do in certain situations ➤ If you include witness testimonies in your portfolio, ensure they are compatible with the assessment plan requirements and are attributable to you, making clear what you as the apprentice specifically did, how this covers the KSBs, the impact of your actions and what relevant company procedures and legal regulations you followed, who was involved in the event/situation and that they are appropriately validated ➤ If a portfolio contains observations of performance, make sure these observations are appropriately endorsed by the training provider or employer

Additional information

EPAOs will provide a range of resources, which are essential reading. There are also other guides available, such as Raising the Standards⁵ - [IfATE's Guide to Quality Apprenticeships](#), this is a series of guides to help apprentices, employers and providers improve the quality of apprenticeships. Topics include induction, training, preparation for end-point assessment, welfare and wellbeing, and equity, diversity, and inclusion. Note these resources may be removed when IfATE is assimilated into Skills England.

GOV.UK have produced an [Apprentice's Line Managers' Guide](#).⁶ The webpage and guide provides line managers with useful information that you will need to know in order to give your apprentice the support they need to reach their potential. You as a line manager play a vital role in the apprenticeship programme and you have a significant influence regarding your apprentice's success.

[Association of Apprenticeships guides](#)⁷ are available to apprentices who are enrolled as members with this organisation. Training providers and EPAOs can have corporate membership which provides free access to the site for their apprentices.

[Off-the Job Training](#)⁸ from GOV.UK, to find out more about 'off-the job training' and how to record it, this guide provides a detailed description of what off-job training is and how it must be recorded, as well as addressing various myths regarding off-job training.

⁵ <https://www.instituteforapprenticeships.org/raising-the-standard-best-practice-guidance/>

⁶ [Line Managers Guide - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

⁷ [Get Ahead Guides for New Apprentices and Line Managers – Association of Apprentices](#)

⁸ [Apprenticeships: off-the-job training - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)