Regulation of apprenticeships

### Sector recognised standards and external regulators

The Office for Students (OfS) [conditions of registration](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/084f719f-5344-4717-a71b-a7ea00b9f53f/quality-and-standards-conditions.pdf) require that for all awards:

* any standards set appropriately reflect any applicable [sector-recognised standards](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/53821cbf-5779-4380-bf2a-aa8f5c53ecd4/sector-recognised-standards.pdf); and
* awards are only granted to students whose knowledge and skills appropriately reflect any applicable sector-recognised standards.

The [sector-recognised standards](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/53821cbf-5779-4380-bf2a-aa8f5c53ecd4/sector-recognised-standards.pdf) for qualifications in England are published by OfS, drawing on other sources, including typical higher education qualifications at each level and degree classification descriptions for bachelors’ degrees. For apprenticeships, overall accountability for the quality, including the occupational standard and the end-point assessment (EPA) sit with the Department for Education (DfE) acting through the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA). The ESFA are accountable for funding education and skills for children, young people, and adults. Apprentices must complete an EPA to demonstrate what they have learnt as part of their apprenticeship. The ESFA is set to close, bringing the current functions into the DfE from March 2025.

The OfS is responsible for the external quality assurance of OfS registered providers that deliver integrated higher and degree apprenticeships (and are therefore responsible for delivering the EPA themselves rather than an independent EPA organisation, EPAO). This applies to apprenticeships run by partner institutions where the University is the EPAO and will therefore be subject to monitoring as with internal apprenticeships.

The Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) are responsible for the development, review, approval, and publishing of apprenticeship standards upon which apprenticeship programmes are based.

The Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills (Ofsted) inspect the quality of apprenticeship training that is delivered by providers to ensure it is high-quality and meets the needs of employers and apprentices.

The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) are responsible for the external quality assurance of the majority of non-integrated apprenticeships at Levels 2-7.

### External regulatory requirements

**The regulation, quality assurance and monitoring of apprenticeships is undertaken by different regulatory bodies. It is vital that the University is prepared for the monitoring and inspection activities that will occur, cyclically, in relation to provision overall and standards of EPAs.**

#### [**Ofsted**](https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofsted)

Ofsted inspect the quality of apprenticeship training that is delivered by providers to ensure it is high-quality and meets the needs of employers and apprentices. For providers offering higher, level 6 plus and degree apprenticeships that are also regulated by the Office for Students (on the OfS Register), these providers are also in scope of OfS regulation. The OfS regulates at provider level and consider apprentices’ outcomes as part of its assessment of the overall quality of a provider. The University was last inspected by Ofsted in January 2024 and received a rating of ‘Good’ across all areas in accordance with the Further education and skills [inspection handbook](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/further-education-and-skills-inspection-handbook-eif/further-education-and-skills-handbook-for-september-2023).

#### The OfS’s role in external quality assurance

Apprentices must complete an EPA to demonstrate what they have learnt. External quality assurance monitors the delivery of these assessments to ensure that they are fair, consistent, and robust across different apprenticeship standards and between different EPAOs. The OfS is responsible for the external quality assurance of OfS registered providers that deliver integrated higher and degree apprenticeships. These providers are therefore responsible for delivering the EPA themselves, rather than an independent EPAO.

#### External quality assurance of apprenticeship EPAs for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships

The OfS sets out [guidance](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/external-quality-assurance-of-apprenticeship-end-point-assessment-for-integrated-higher-and-degree-apprenticeships/?utm_source=OfS+alerts&utm_campaign=da5d957eac-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_10_12_11_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-da5d957eac-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D) on how it carries out the external quality assurance (EQA) of EPAs. This includes the OfS’s approach to ensuring EPAOs are ready to deliver EPAs for internal and partner apprenticeships, the OfS’s approach to monitoring the quality of EPAs, assessment team, and assessment reports.

As part of the EQA process, when an EPAO intends to deliver EPA for a new apprenticeship standard, the OfS may conduct readiness checks. These confirm that the EPAO is ready and able to ensure timely delivery of assessments for apprentices who have completed their training programme and are ready to take the EPA. The OfS can only deliver EQA for providers that are registered on the OfS Register and are delivering an integrated higher and degree apprenticeship.

An assessment team will conduct the readiness check assessment. There will be two assessors in each team. The assessment team will comprise an external expert apprenticeship assessor who will be appointed to review the information and evidence submitted by the EPAO alongside an OfS officer. EPAOs will be required to prepare a self-assessment and submit evidence for any new apprenticeship standards for which the EPAO intends to deliver EPA and where a readiness check is required. A template setting out the requirements for the EPAO’s submission will be provided and discussed at the initial online meeting between the EPAO and the assessment team

The assessment team will review a range of evidence which may include, but is not limited to:

* The EPAO’s academic regulations
* Assessment and support materials
* EPA delivery plans
* Materials relevant to the assessor recruitment and training
* Policies and procedures, including internal quality assurance arrangements.

EPAOs will be asked in the readiness check submission to provide details of the external examiner arrangements in place for the associated qualifications, including how the EPAO manages potential conflicts of interest and how they have the appropriate expertise. EPAOs will need to make sure, and be able to evidence that, external examiners have access to regular updates to ensure their practice is current and consistent with expectations in the sector.

The assessment team will set out its findings in a written report for the specified apprenticeship standard. The readiness check report will include the outcome of the assessment and whether the EPAO is ready to deliver the specified apprenticeship EPA, including identifying any recommendations for improvement and actions that should be taken.

Please review the [guidance](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/external-quality-assurance-of-apprenticeship-end-point-assessment-for-integrated-higher-and-degree-apprenticeships/?utm_source=OfS+alerts&utm_campaign=da5d957eac-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_10_12_11_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-da5d957eac-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D) by the OfS for more details regarding the procedure of a readiness check and what will be required.

#### EQA monitoring checks by the OfS

When an EPAO has completed at least one cycle of EPA it may be required to undergo an EQA monitoring check by the OfS. The monitoring check is designed to ensure that the actual delivery of EPA provides a relevant, reliable, and independent assessment of occupational competence.

EPAOs will be selected for OfS EQA monitoring checks of their delivery of EPA based on risk. Every EPAO will undergo monitoring activity. Which apprenticeship standards selected for a monitoring check will be based on apprentice numbers and whether the apprenticeship standard has been identified as higher risk by IfATE. The number of apprenticeship standards the OfS assess at each EPAO may also vary. The OfS is likely to prioritise EPAO’s for monitoring checks based on the number of apprentices on apprenticeship standards.

**Monitoring checks ensure that:**

* Each EPAO is providing high-quality, relevant assessment
* The assessments are in line with the assessment plan
* EPAs are consistent across all EPAOs delivering on that apprenticeship standard

There is an expectation that EPAOs will undertake ongoing quality monitoring of EPA in line with the published assessment plan both internally, through the EPAO’s quality monitoring processes, and externally, by the external examiner. The OfS EQA monitoring checks will be informed by the outcomes of these ongoing quality monitoring processes. Ongoing external monitoring is normally undertaken by the external examiner appointed by the EPAO, who has oversight of the higher education qualification which is integrated in the apprenticeship (such as the degree) and the apprenticeship EPA.

The monitoring check will be managed by an OfS officer who will act as liaison between the monitoring assessment team and the EPAO. The OfS officer will organise an initial meeting with the EPAO in advance of the OfS EQA monitoring check to confirm the monitoring assessment process and arrangements, including the planned duration and timings for the monitoring assessment. 51. The OfS monitoring check will test the EPAO’s compliance with IfATE’s EQA framework. EPAOs will receive a report from the monitoring check which sets out any compliance risks.

As the EPAO, the University will be required to provide the following documentation (non-exhaustive list): policy documents, assessment materials, support material, strategy for internal quality assurance, details of planning for EPA delivery, data on EPA including registrations and outcomes, CVs, qualifications and continuous professional development records for assessors, feedback from

stakeholders such as apprentices and employers, records of internal quality assurance activities, reasonable adjustments or special considerations granted, conflicts of interest records.

The assessment team will set out its findings in a written monitoring check report. The report will summarise its findings, identifying areas of strength and recommendations for improvement, and a conclusion on whether the delivery of the EPA is fit-for-purpose in accordance with the EPA plan criteria, with an outcome of either:

EQA readiness checks and monitoring check reports will be made available to the EPAO and IfATE. In line with the IfATE’s EQA framework, the OfS will provide a report to IfATE on the EPAO’s delivery of EPA for the apprenticeship standards sampled. The reports will be used by IfATE to inform the planning of future activities and the sharing of good practice, highlight to EPAOs the areas for development, and encourage continuous improvement across the EPAOs and their EPAs. EPAOs may not publish their report or any aspect of this, as stated within the EQA framework. There is also the possibility of unscheduled additional monitoring.

Please review the [guidance](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/external-quality-assurance-of-apprenticeship-end-point-assessment-for-integrated-higher-and-degree-apprenticeships/?utm_source=OfS+alerts&utm_campaign=da5d957eac-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2023_10_12_11_24&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_-da5d957eac-%5BLIST_EMAIL_ID%5D) by the OfS for more details regarding the procedure of a readiness check and what will be required.

For queries relating to Apprenticeships, please contact the [Apprenticeships Hub](https://www.essex.ac.uk/apprenticeships).

For queries regarding external regulation, please contact [Quality and Academic Development](https://www.essex.ac.uk/staff/professional-services/quality-and-development-team).

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