

Applying for Ofqual recognition

In these case studies, we will take a look at the experiences of 4 end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) who have achieved Ofqual recognition: Autoexel, EMPI Awards, Awarding UK and Achieve and Partners.

We have collected feedback from these organisations which we hope will help others thinking about, or in the process of, applying for recognition. We share the benefits they found, challenges they experienced and their top tips on applying for recognition.

At the end of the case studies you will find useful links to further resources, as well as how to get in contact with us.

What were the additional benefits of applying for Ofqual recognition to your organisation?

All of the organisations realised additional benefits that have improved their organisations in a variety of ways, such as:

- improved organisational policies, procedures and operations
- strengthened governance
- improved knowledge and expertise within the organisation

Autoexel told us that they used the rigorous process of gaining recognition as an opportunity to take an in-depth review of how their organisation was operating and will operate in the future, asking themselves if it was the best it can be and in line with their long-term goal of “doing the right thing for their industry”.

We reviewed how we did things and how we can improve things, this made Autoexel a much less vulnerable organisation and a safer organisation.

Autoexel

Achieve and Partners and Awarding UK used the General Conditions as well as the Criteria for Recognition to reflect on their organisation’s operations, policies and procedures to ensure that they are the best that they can possibly be. For Achieve and Partners, this helped them to build in compliance from the beginning, and ensured that they had a strong understanding of how their policies and procedures worked in practice across the full qualification lifecycle.

All 4 organisations also highlighted the benefit of improved governance. All organisations reported a strengthened body of governance, either by adding more independence to their governing boards or building a stronger network of advisory voices available to their organisations. This strengthened their

organisation's wider proficiency and capabilities in assessment and managing risk, which in turn helped to improve their application further.

EMPI Awards also found that in reviewing operations, processes and procedures for their end-point assessments as part of the application, they improved the way that they design, deliver and award other non-regulated qualifications for their industry.

What were the greatest challenges and realisations?

The bar to achieving recognition is the same, whatever type of qualification or EPA you are offering. It is a high bar because of our statutory duties to maintain standards and protect learners. This means that applicants must spend time demonstrating what they are capable of, and consider the evidence required to meet these standards.

Each organisation shared some of the challenges that they found in achieving recognition. Every organisation is different, so some of these challenges may or may not be similar to those that others experience.

Some of the challenges the organisations faced were:

- the timescales and resources required
- the language used in our documents
- the way that EPAs are regulated as qualifications
- managing and mitigating against conflicts of interest

Awarding UK found that the timescales required were a challenge. Being able to maintain organisational buy-in and resources over a period of months was important and something they had to manage throughout the process.

EMPI Awards' greatest realisation was that previous work on their application to the ESFA's register of end-point assessment organisations was very different to our requirements, therefore taking more time and resources than originally planned. While there is some crossover in the 2 applications, and we are actively working with the ESFA on aligning the processes, they found that we required more detail on qualifications and assessment, and a more holistic view of how policies and procedures worked in practice throughout the entire qualification lifecycle. If you would like more information, or have any questions relating to our recognition process and the ESFA's register of EPAOs, get in touch with us using the details at the bottom of this page.

Autoexel also found that the greatest challenge to overcome was the time and extra resources required for developing the application, and the wider commitment needed to take on the responsibility of becoming a regulated EPAO. Although Autoexel found the application itself mainly straightforward, they noted that they found our language different to that already used in their organisation, particularly around treating EPAs as qualifications and referring to training providers as centres.

Language was also a challenge for Awarding UK and Achieve and Partners.

Awarding UK found recognition as “a variation on a theme” having significant experience of regulation in Higher Education, but they found that the language used in regulating university qualifications was different from that used by us. A challenge for them was writing policies where their internal/sector vocabulary was different to that of ours and the apprenticeship assessment plans’. In some instances, they had to separate out their HE policies and their EPA policies, and with hindsight believe that this was a good thing to do, as there are some differences in the regulatory requirements for certain areas, for example in appeals policies and procedures.

Achieve and Partners encountered challenges around EPAs being treated as a qualification for regulatory purposes. Although their team is made up of experienced Responsible Officers, they found it a challenge to take the apprenticeship assessment plans, which were not designed and developed by themselves, and work out how they could apply their organisation’s assessment policies, procedures and infrastructure in a compliant way. EMPI Awards found that they did not foresee some of the conflicts of interest that existed within their organisation, and had to develop policies and procedures to manage those conflicts. We have recently published further guidance on conflicts of interest, which you can find a link to below under further resources.

What are your top tips for organisations applying for Ofqual recognition?

Achieve and Partners recommend that organisations take the time to consider what it means to be a regulated Awarding Organisation, and the responsibility that goes with that. It is important to make sure your organisation is capable and has the appropriate resources and assessment expertise in place.

Do your homework to understand what it means to be regulated – what does it mean to be an awarding organisation and the responsibility that goes with it – that every learner has a fair assessment.

Achieve and Partners

Awarding UK also recommend taking the time at the start to read and fully understand our Conditions, Criteria of Recognition and guidance documents, and to make sure you have the most up-to-date information. They recommend using the process as an opportunity to double check everything that you are currently doing and ensure that everything is the best it can be.

If you have any questions then don’t be afraid to ask Ofqual, and don’t see feedback as negative, Ofqual is asking these things for a reason and their questions and feedback need to be considered seriously.

Awarding UK

EMPI Awards recommend that organisations consider the General Conditions of Recognition as a starting point, and do a self-assessment of compliance against them. They used a traffic light system of green (compliant), amber (partially compliant) and red (non-compliant). This was useful as it enabled them to fully understand both the language and our approach to regulation. While this took time, it helped in the long run as it ensured that their application was as strong as it could be.

EMPI Awards also emphasise the importance of considering key questions throughout the application such as:

- is it the best it can be?
- what does good look like?
- who does what, where, when, why and, most importantly, how?

Autoexel recommend considering how other organisations have approached the application, but coming up with your own way of doing it. Each organisation is different and our recognition application allows for creativity and individuality. It is not a checklist. We will tell you what needs to be achieved, but not how to do it. Therefore, it is important to show us your way of doing things, what good looks like for you and your sector, and how that all works in practice.

Own the application, you have to live and breathe it as you will be questioned on it at the panel meeting.

Autoexel

All 4 organisations also told us that EPAOs should fully understand everything that's written in their application.

An EPAO must take ownership over their own application, even when using consultants – own your homework, it's okay to have a tutor to clarify, challenge, add value, but you have to own your homework to be successful.

Awarding UK

Further resources

If you are considering applying for Ofqual recognition and have any questions then please get in touch. If you want to talk to us about applying for recognition please [register on the Recognition Gateway](#). Once you have registered on our Recognition Gateway, we can arrange a meeting with one of our team to talk you through the recognition process in more detail and answer any questions that you have.

Alternatively, please email Strategic.Relationships@Ofqual.gov.uk

The resources below will help you with the process, including next steps and further information.