

Glenys Stacey's speech at Inside Government Apprenticeship Conference 2020

Hello, and thank you for inviting me to speak at this year's conference. It is such a pleasure to be here – even in digital form – and to have the chance to hear from you as well.

Can I thank you first of all for the enormous effort being put in to ensure high quality apprenticeship assessments can continue to be delivered to apprentices, in this exceptional year. Thank you.

I would like to thank all involved in ensuring we get the best possible outcomes for apprentices, in a safe and secure way. I've been back at Ofqual since August and I have been impressed by the focus and effort we and others are putting into this important area of work. For our part, you will know that we are working closely with the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education and ESFA to ensure that apprentices and employers benefit from regulated external quality assurance (EQA) of apprenticeship end-point assessments.

Today I will talk about five things: our role in EQA; the progress we are making with the transition of EQA to Ofqual; our approach to EQA; how we work with the Institute, and last but not least the importance of ensuring that the employer voice is embedded in our work.

Our role in EQA

Our role in EQA of apprenticeships started in 2016 when we accepted our first end-point assessments as an EQA provider. Over the last 4 years, we have been one of several EQA providers, and we've come a long way over this time. In February 2020, the Institute published its consultation on strengthening and simplifying the EQA landscape, with a proposal that EQA should be provided by Ofqual, for most standards, and the Office for Students, for integrated degrees. And in August 2020, the Institute published the outcomes of its consultation confirming that it planned to move forward with this proposal. We welcome this greater role for Ofqual in the EQA of apprenticeships and are working closely with the Institute to deliver the transition as smoothly as possible over the next 18 months.

Now on to my second point. On November 12th, we became the EQA provider for an additional 70 or so standards offered by 22 Ofqual regulated awarding organisations. This is an important milestone, but it will be the first of many as we transition over 500 standards in the next 18 months.

In year one, which began in August this year, we will transfer standards where the Institute is the current EQA provider. There are over 300 standards in scope for this year. In year two, we will focus on transferring standards

from other EQA providers. Make no mistake, this is an important piece of work to deliver, but I am confident that we are putting in the necessary resources to do it successfully, so that we can all realise the benefit of a simplified and strengthened EQA system.

We have already engaged with over 80 new end-point assessment organisations since the announcement in August and we are starting to see applications come through. Out of those who have applied most recently, I know eight are currently being reviewed and two have recently been approved. Congratulations to Awarding UK – part of Bishop Grosseteste University – and Achieve and Partners, who have both been recognised in the last few weeks.

Our approach to EQA

Moving now to our approach to EQA: we are aiming a fair and consistent approach to end-point assessment, regardless of which organisation is delivering it, and where and when it is carried out.

If you are an employer you can be confident that end-point assessments will be centred around the assessment of occupational competence, and that whichever end-point assessment organisation you choose will offer a high-quality regulated end-point assessment. And if you are an apprentice, you can have confidence that we can use our regulatory powers and act to put things right, if by any chance things do go wrong.

Our EQA approach aligns with the Institute's EQA framework, which includes upfront quality control mechanisms, ongoing quality assurance and continuous improvement. But you won't be surprised to hear that, as a regulator, we will use the regulatory tools and levers we have at our disposal to deliver EQA.

The Institute's EQA consultation response recognised that the ability of Ofqual to use regulatory powers was one of the key reasons that the proposed approach would strengthen and increase confidence in apprenticeship end-point assessments. We have a wide gamut of powers. We can for example direct an end-point assessment organisation to do something or stop doing something, and we can fine organisations if they are found to be in breach of our rules. Of course, we work with end-point assessment organisations to resolve problems in the first instance, but it is always useful to have powers to take further action if needed.

The first stage of our EQA approach is recognition of end-point assessment organisations. All end-point assessment organisations will need to be recognised by Ofqual to continue delivering end-point assessments once EQA transfers to Ofqual. Our recognition process sets a consistent bar for all organisations that want to deliver end-point assessments in the market. It seeks to ensure organisations have robust governance and financial resources in place, which are relevant to their scope of operation, and that they have the appropriate competencies needed to design and deliver assessment services in their chosen field. This process considers the diversity in the type of organisations we recognise, from professional bodies to niche, sector specific end-point assessment organisations and much larger organisations such as HEIs.

Once recognised, end-point assessment organisations can expect to be involved in quality assurance activities, from monitoring specific aspects of delivery, to evaluating assessment materials and increasingly observing end-point assessments in delivery. As a regulator we take a risk-based approach to regulation, and to EQA. We will target our EQA activities where we have greatest concern, or where our work will have greatest impact in preventing things from going wrong, and we have a range of expertise, tools and legal powers on which we can draw.

How we work with the Institute

Let me speak now about how we work with the Institute, as it is perhaps one of the most important ways to help secure quality in apprenticeships and their end-point assessments.

We are working closely with the Institute to deliver EQA. The Institute's role is to oversee the quality of apprenticeships. As the predominant EQA provider we work with them in a variety of ways, to enable them to do this. Our approach is collaborative and includes sharing information, and findings, particularly at points where we have concerns that the validity of end-point assessments or where the interests of apprentices are at risk.

We will share reports on EPAOs and their EPAs with the Institute, and we are also active members the Institute's Quality Alliance with ESFA, Ofsted, QAA and the Office for Students. Collaboration between us all is essential to ensure quality remains at the heart of the apprenticeship system.

And finally, one of the key areas we will work with the Institute over the coming months is the development of the Employer Directory. We already use occupational expertise in our work in several ways – for example to support with the review of assessment materials (which we call technical evaluation) and we hope to be able to use employer expertise in our monitoring approach as part of our field work in the future. We look forward to the Institute's development of an Employer Directory, from which we will draw, so that more employers and professional bodies can support and inform our work. It is crucial that we get this important piece of the EQA puzzle right to ensure that employers continue to play a pivotal role in the quality of apprenticeships.

Conclusion

I hope this has given you an overview of the transition of EQA to Ofqual and what to expect from our approach to EQA.

And that taking a regulated approach to EQA will ensure consistency and give confidence that we can achieve a better system of quality assurance for apprentices and employers. We will continue to work collaboratively with the Institute, ESFA, employers and end-point assessment organisations to make this happen. Thank you for listening.