

Mandating Qualifications in Apprenticeship standards for regulated healthcare professions

1. Introduction

This information is provided for the purpose of outlining the benefits and dis-benefits of mandating a qualification within an apprenticeship standard for a regulated healthcare profession. It has been informed by the Institute for Apprenticeships Guidance to Trailblazers in place at the time of writing in January 2018.

2. Options

Option	Benefits	Dis-Benefits
In the apprenticeship standard state that apprentices “ undertake a ‘insert professional regulator’ accredited/recognised course/qualification” prior to the EPA (no specific qualification is named in the apprenticeship standard).	<p>Apprenticeship standard can be submitted to the IfA prior to qualifications or courses being developed.</p> <p>Does not restrict to a single regulated qualification. Therefore, providers of both recognised qualifications and any accredited programmes will be ESFA fundable.</p>	<p>Completion of a qualification is not mandated.</p> <p>Difficult to ensure apprentices are undertaking programmes aligned with the apprenticeship standard as this may be out of sync with professional body requirements.</p> <p>Will not be able to integrate the end-point assessment. Risks highlighted in 3.1 may increase market instability.</p> <p>Funding band allocated will be for the programme that is viewed as best value for money by the IfA.</p>
In the apprenticeship standard mandate the qualification - Requires the apprentice to “ undertake a specific named regulated qualification” .	<p>The qualifications have additional QA through Ofqual/ QAA.</p> <p>Regulated qualifications support career progression.</p> <p>A regulated qualification can include integrated end-point assessment, reducing the risks outlined in 3.1 and providing added quality assurance and market stability. At the time of writing this can only be a Degree or Masters Degree.</p> <p>Opportunity to engage awarding organisations in collaborative development of a single qualification which ensures consistency and employer confidence.</p>	<p>The apprentice must undertake the named qualification. Only providers of this qualification (developed by awarding organisations, approved by Ofqual/ QAA and recognised by the professional regulator) will be ESFA fundable i.e. professional regulator <i>accredited programmes</i> equivalent to recognised qualifications will not be included.</p> <p>Only qualifications at level stated in the standard are eligible for funding.</p> <p>Apprenticeship standard cannot be submitted to the IfA until the qualification is accredited with the qualifications regulator.</p>

3.1 Supporting Context

3.1 End-point assessment (EPA)

The new apprenticeship model requires **summative assessment of competence via a single end-point assessment (EPA)**, after the apprentice has completed their training. The EPA has been designed to provide assurance to employers that the apprentice possesses the knowledge, skills and behaviours to be fully competent in their occupation. Assessment undertaken during the apprenticeship training period is formative, designed to inform the training provider and employer of apprentice preparedness to sit the EPA.

The EPA must be undertaken by an independent third party organisation (or individual in the case of integrated EPA) who has not been involved in the training or line management of the apprentice. Apprentices cannot receive certification of apprenticeship completion until they have passed the associated EPA. Training providers are monitored on their EPA pass rates and face performance scrutiny and financial penalty for low pass rates or failure to complete EPA, introducing a risk of instability to training provider availability, particularly where the market is small.

In the case of regulated professions, where regulatory educational standards and assessment standards must be met by training providers, the apprenticeship training will also need to involve summative assessment. Therefore, upon completion of their training, apprentices will have met the requirements for registration. There is therefore little incentive for apprentices to undergo a further summative assessment in the form of the EPA – a mandatory component of the new apprenticeship training model. This introduces the potential for some difficult scenarios, some examples of which are outlined below:

An apprentice completes their apprenticeship training, registers with the regulator and perhaps even commences work as a registered professional but:

- fails to pass their EPA (indicating the individual is not competent)
- fails to undertake their EPA (exposing the training provider to a loss of up to 20% of apprenticeship funding)
- fails to pass or undertake their EPA and then makes a significant or fatal error in practice

3.2 Policy

Many apprenticeship standards at Level 6 or above involve completion of a degree as well as an apprenticeship. In many of these cases, employers, HE providers and professional bodies have come together to co-design a fully integrated degree course, designed specifically for apprentices. This delivers and tests both academic learning and on-the-job training. This model does not remove the requirement for an EPA, but it is integrated into the programme rather than undertaken as a separate external assessment. These are known as integrated degree apprenticeships.

Recognising the issues faced by registered professions that do not require degree-level education prior to registration, Skills for Health, Health Education England and Department of Health have made a formal case to the Institute for Apprenticeships (IfA) for integrated end-point assessment to be made available for all apprenticeship programmes that result in professional registration, regardless of the level.

This is currently being considered, with an outcome expected in early 2018.

3.3 Mandatory Qualifications within an Apprenticeship Standard

As the EPA is designed to provide definitive evidence that the apprentice has acquired full competence, the IfA do not generally accept the mandatory inclusion of qualifications within apprenticeship standards. However, mandatory qualifications can be included if they are: a) a regulatory/mandatory requirement in the occupational area to which the standard relates or b) required for professional registration.

Where the IfA refer to a 'qualification' this means those regulated by Ofqual or QAA. Where an apprenticeship standard may state that the 'apprentice must complete a programme approved by xxx' this is not mandating a qualification in the view of the IfA. Where a qualification is mandated it must be named and be at the same 'level' as the standard.

If the professional regulator or the trailblazer group determine that the qualification must be mandated there can only be one qualification, which can have more than one awarding body, and it must be named. The trailblazer group must submit evidence with the draft standard to meet the criteria set for mandating a qualification. The group are also required to provide a letter from the professional regulator that confirms that completion of the apprenticeship will lead to registration.

If the standard includes a mandated qualification that qualification must already be accredited with the qualification regulator e.g. Ofqual. An apprenticeship standard cannot mandate a qualification that is 'in development'.

Where qualifications are mandated, passing them will be a prerequisite to taking the EPA for all apprentices, except in the case of integrated apprenticeships where the EPA is part of the qualification.