

Conflict of Interest Policy for the appointment of Independent Assessors and External Examiners for End Point Assessment of Integrated Higher and Degree Apprenticeships

1. Overview:

- 1.1. The University of Exeter is a “training provider” of higher and degree apprenticeships. All apprenticeships have an End Point Assessment (EPA) element which takes place at the end of the apprenticeship. The University uses external End Point Assessment Organisations (EPAOs) to carry out EPAs for all apprenticeships that are categorised as *non-integrated* (by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE)). For apprenticeships that are categorised as *integrated*, the University is the EPAO as well as the training provider.
- 1.2. The great strength of EPA is that it is an independent judgement of an apprentice’s occupational competence by assessors who are experts in, and respected by, the occupation. In degree apprenticeships, where the training provider is also the EPAO, independence is more difficult to achieve than in non-integrated apprenticeships. The EPAO must therefore make the EPA as independent as possible and have policies and procedures in place to achieve this. All assessors, and especially independent assessors, must not have an actual or potential conflict of interest relating to the end-point assessment of an apprentice (including by way of moderation)¹, without suitable mitigation in place in accordance with this Policy.
- 1.3. EPAs in degree apprenticeships must be carried out by at least one Independent Assessor drawn from the occupation who are impartial and distinct from the on-programme delivery. Ideally all the EPA assessors will be externally appointed independent assessors. An EPA must also have external quality assurance carried out by an EPA External Examiner.
- 1.4. For integrated higher and degree apprenticeships, EPAOs should engage an external examiner to undertake a similar role specifically for the EPA².
- 1.5. Both the Department for Education/Education and Skills Funding Agency and the OfS require EPAOs to be independent, and for the University to manage and mitigate any potential or actual conflicts of interest in the delivery of integrated apprenticeships. This policy aims to outline the measures the University has in place to manage and mitigate any potential or actual conflicts in relation to its EPA delivery.

2. Definitions:

Conflict of interest – a situation in which an individual or the University as a whole has a financial or non-financial interest which could compromise, or appear to compromise, the outcome of an EPA. This covers both perceived and potential conflicts of interest, as well as actual conflicts of interest.

End Point Assessment (EPA) - an independent assessment that takes place at the end of the apprenticeship training. This is to test that the apprentice is competent in their occupation. All apprentices must complete an EPA. There are a variety of assessment methods to test apprentices' competency.

¹ [Source: IfATE, [Section Degree Apprenticeships, Assessors](#)]

² [Source: [OfS External quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships -Guidance for providers](#); Section 29, pg 7]

End Point Assessment Organisation (EPAO) – A body conducting the End Point Assessment. In the case of integrated Degree Apprenticeships, the University is the EPAO. This is distinct from the on-programme delivery and plays a crucial role at the end of the apprenticeship. The EPAO takes responsibility for the apprentice’s final assessment against the apprenticeship requirements³.

Independent Assessor (IA) – Conducts the End Point Assessment as set out in the End Point Assessment (EPA) Plan and makes valid assessment and grading decisions during the EPA.

EPA External Examiner – provides external scrutiny of the EPA aspect of a higher or integrated degree apprenticeship, similar to how an External Examiner for the associated qualification would provide external scrutiny of assessments and awards. EPAOs should engage an External Examiner to undertake this role specifically for the EPA. Where appropriate, EPAOs may engage an existing External Examiner to review the EPA (which will then be in addition to the external examiner role held with the associated qualification)⁴.

The role of EPA External Examiner should not be confused with the role of Independent Assessor and vice versa.

Independent Assessor (IA) – Conducts the End Point Assessment as set out in the End Point Assessment (EPA) Plan and makes valid assessment and grading decisions during the EPA.

University - University of Exeter as well as any subsidiary majority owned by the University of Exeter.

3. Scope

- 3.1. This Policy applies to the **University** when it is acting as the EPAO in integrated higher and degree apprenticeships that it is delivering. It also applies to any **Independent Assessor** and **EPA External Examiner**, as well as all staff, consultants and any other individual or organisation taking part in an EPA on behalf of the University.
- 3.2. University staff, honorary contract holders and external members of University Council and Council’s Committees should also read the University’s general Conflict of Interest Policy, as it will apply to them:

<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/departments/cgr/researchethics/codesandpolicies/#a7>

4. General Responsibilities

- 4.1. When acting as the EPAO for an integrated higher or degree apprenticeship it is delivering, the University and all those involved in delivering the EPA must ensure there is no potential or actual conflict of interest that could affect the objectivity and consistency of the outcome of EPA. In particular, the University must ensure that those delivering the apprenticeship training are not involved in the EPA, and must maintain such separation. This responsibility extends to the University ensuring that individuals involved in the EPA are also not involved in progress reviews or management or mentoring of the relevant apprentices.
- 4.2. Other examples of potential conflicts are given below for those individuals involved in the EPA (this is a non-exhaustive list of examples):
 - is employed by or has a position of authority within one organisation that conflicts with their interests in another organisation;

³ [Source: <https://www.apprenticeships.gov.uk/employers/end-point-assessments#>]

⁴ [Source: [OfS External quality assurance of apprenticeship end-point assessments for integrated higher and degree apprenticeships -Guidance for providers](#); Section 29, pg 7]

- has any financial or personal link to the same organisation as the apprentice (e.g. receives money from the same organisation, or has friends or family at the same organisation);
 - may receive a personal or business benefit or detriment from the results of the EPA (e.g. incentives and inducements based on success rates);
 - is employed by an organisation who is a direct competitor of the apprentice's employer.
- 4.3. The University is responsible for making relevant individuals aware of this Policy, and asking them to self-declare any conflicts of interest using the Conflict of Interest form (see Appendix A). Conflict of Interest forms will be kept by EPA Advisor and may be shared with Programme team. This ensures that any conflicts are identified and mitigation is planned. Responsibility for addressing any disclosed conflicts of interest sits with EPA Advisor.
- 4.4. The responsibility for maintaining this Policy and answering queries in relation to it is with Senior Quality and Standards Advisor (Degree Apprenticeships).
- 4.5. Specific requirements, exclusions and mitigations for **Independent Assessors** and **EPA External Examiners** are set out below.
- 4.6. The existence of this Policy is not in any way intended to question the integrity of those it applies to, but is necessary to protect them and the University from reputational damage or other liabilities.
- 4.7. Failure to seek approval for and/or disclose complete and accurate information on conflict of interests, or to appropriately manage a conflict of interest as agreed **may**:
- for staff of the University: constitute misconduct and result in disciplinary action being taken by the University.
 - for non-staff of the University: result in the termination of their engagement with the University in respect of the EPA, and in accordance with the contract with those individuals.
- 4.8. All records in relation to conflicts of interest will be retained in accordance with the Data Protection Act 2018 and the University's retention policies for either staff or external engagements. Conflicts may need to be declared to the University's regulator, which could include the OfS, Ofsted, the ESFA and/or the Department for Education.

5. Procedures for Independent Assessors

- 5.1. The specific Independent Assessor(s) criteria and requirements outlined in the EPA Assessment Plan for each Standard must be followed.
- 5.2. All IAs are required to declare any known conflict of interest at the point at which they arise, and must complete a Conflict of Interest form (see Appendix A) when asked to do so by the University (this may be at the point of application to the University, at the point of being appointed as an EPA Assessor or otherwise before the EPA starts). This ensures that any conflicts are identified and mitigation is planned.
- 5.3. Once appointed, the IA will be given a list of apprentices' and employers' names to confirm there is no conflict of interest. The IA shall review and update any known conflicts of interest throughout their engagement as an IA.

6. Potential Conflicts of Interest Examples - Independent Assessors

This is a non-exhaustive list of examples of actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest:

- 6.1. An IA engaged in a current financial or personal relationship with any individual who is involved in the delivery of the programme.
- 6.2. An IA involved in training or employment of the apprentices.
- 6.3. An IA employed by the same organisation as the apprentice.
- 6.4. An IA receiving personal benefit or detriment from the result of the assessment⁵.
- 6.5. An IA being a member of a governing body linked to the programme, or a participant/member of the IfATE's directory of professional and employer-led bodies that support external quality assurance;
- 6.6. An IA being a member of a committee in the Department delivering the programme.

If conflicts of interest are declared and identified, the University will work through the exceptions and mitigations set out in section 7 below.

7. Exceptions and mitigation

- 7.1. The EPA plan (as published by IfATE for the relevant standard) may allow EPA assessors from other universities, professional bodies or the University department (subject to safeguards about conflicts of interest)⁶.
- 7.2. Where an EPA Plan allows for an IA to be recruited from within the University department, or does not specify that they cannot be recruited from within the department, the department must ensure that the IA has not been involved in programme delivery, does not know apprentices personally, has not been involved in their training or employment, in addition to complying with the conflict of interest procedure set out in section 5. Specifically, they must not receive a personal benefit or detriment from the result of the assessment and must only deem an apprentice to be occupationally competent in accordance with the EPA plan's grading descriptors⁷.
- 7.3. In such instances as in 7.2, external scrutiny of the EPA will be carried out by an External Examiner. The EPAO may engage an existing External Examiner to review the EPA, or recruit a separate one. In either case, the External Examiner must be independent and meet the Criteria for Appointment as set out in the [TQA External Examining Handbook, Section 2.1](#). In addition, they must be occupationally competent and credible to act as an EPA External Examiner.
- 7.4. Where it is not practicable for the University to appoint an Independent Assessor from outside the University - for example, where there is a shortage of experts who would meet all the Independent Assessor requirements for a particular EPA Assessment Plan, assessors may be appointed from within the Department, providing they meet the expertise and qualification criteria as set out in the Assessment Plan. The following mitigation actions may be taken in this instance:

⁵ [Source: IfATE, [Degree Apprenticeships, Section 5, Assessors](#)]

⁶ [Source: IfATE, [Degree Apprenticeships, Section 5, Assessors](#)].

⁷ [Source: IfATE, [Degree Apprenticeships, Section 5, Assessors](#)]

- The Department will carry out a risk assessment of the conflicts and mitigations.
 - Obtaining suitable undertakings from individuals involved in the EPA, regarding confidentiality and objectivity;
 - Enhanced monitoring of an individual's activity within the EPA delivery (e.g. by the EPA External Examiner and through internal moderation);
 - The department will seek approval for the appointment from the Associate Pro-Vice Chancellors for Education and Associate Dean for Taught Students (Degree Apprenticeships).
 - The department will ensure that they have an independent EPA External Examiner in place to provide external scrutiny.
 - if there are still any concerns with regards to the conflict of interest, the department will consult with the OfS as the Regulator.
- 7.5. The EPAO is free to make arrangements with other organisations (such as other EPAOs and professional bodies) to facilitate the recruiting of suitable industry and independent assessors⁸.
- 7.6. The EPA Plan may allow a programme External Examiner to act as an Independent Assessor, as in the case with the Level 6 and Level 7 Diagnostic Radiographer EPA Assessment Plans, where the Exam Board is the EPA. In this instance, the University External Examiner criteria of appointment will apply as in the [TQA External Examining Handbook, Section 2.1 Criteria for Appointment](#), or in accordance with any Professional Statutory Regulatory Body (PSRB) requirements for an accredited programme.

8. Procedures for EPA External Examiners

- 8.1. The focus of an EPA External Examiner is specifically on the EPA and, where appropriate, providers are expected to engage an External Examiner for the associated qualification to act as the EPA External Examiner as well.
- 8.2. As detailed in 5.3 above, the University's recruitment criteria and other guidance outlined in the [TQA External Examining Handbook](#) should be applied to the EPA External Examiner, in addition to any requirements outlined in the EPA Assessment Plan.
- 8.3. Depending on the size and complexity of the provision, or the specifics of the Standard and/or its EPA Assessment Plan, the University can determine whether to appoint a single External Examiner who also provides external scrutiny of EPA, or a team of External Examiners where one has the EPA responsibilities, provided the appointee is suitable for the role of EPA EE⁹.
- 8.4. Examples of potential conflicts of interests are as outlined in the External Examiner Criteria in the [TQA External Examining Handbook, Section 2.1 Criteria for Appointment](#)
- 8.5. In addition to the criteria and procedures outlined in the TQA External Examining Handbook, EPA External Examiners should complete the Declaration of Conflict of Interest Form in the Appendix A of this Policy.

⁸ [Source: IfATE, [Degree Apprenticeships, Section 5, Assessors](#)].

⁹ [Source: [DQB External Quality Assurance of End-Point Assessment for Integrated Higher and Degree Apprenticeships](#) - Handbook for Providers; email advice from QAA].

Appendix A: Conflict of Interest Form for Independent Assessors in relation to End Point Assessments

Please complete one of the tables below to record any actual, potential or perceived conflicts of interest you may have, or to confirm that you have no conflicts of interest, in relation to acting as an Independent Assessor for End Point Assessments.

Please ensure you have read the Conflict of Interest Policy for Independent Assessors for End Point Assessments in Integrated Degree Apprenticeships. Please update these records as necessary.

Name of the Independent Assessor/EPA External Examiner (select as appropriate)	
DECLARATION OF NO CONFLICT OF INTEREST	I confirm that I was provided names of apprentices taking the End Point Assessment for[state the title of Standard and cohort].
	I confirm that neither I nor my family members have any conflict of interest which could compromise delivery of End Point Assessment
Signed:	
Date:	

OR

Name of the Independent Assessor/EPA External Examiner (select as appropriate)	
DECLARATION OF INTEREST	I confirm that I was provided names of apprentices taking the End Point Assessment for[state the title of Standard and cohort].
	I set out my (or my family members') potential, actual or perceived interests below, in accordance with the UoE Conflict of Interest Policy for Independent Assessors and External Examiners for End Point Assessments in Integrated Degree Apprenticeships
1.	
2.	
3.	
4.	(continue as required)
Signed:	
Date:	

To be completed by the University:

ACTION by the University of Exeter	No Conflict: No action required	
	Conflict: Appoint another Independent Assessor/EPA External Examiner (select as appropriate)	
	Conflict: Mitigating Action	
Mitigation action:		
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.	(continue as required)	
Signed		
Name		
Role at UoE		
Date		