City & Guilds

SECURING APPRENTICE SUCCESS FROM START TO FINISH

Guidance and practical advice for providers

Getting started
How to develop a clear onboarding plan and learning structure for your apprentices

On-programme learning
How to overcome common challenges and ensure your apprentices have the knowledge, skills and behaviours to succeed

Assessment
How to help your apprentices prepare for end-point assessment and give them the best chance for success

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This guide shares tips and practical advice to help increase your apprenticeship completion rates

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WHY THIS GUIDE?

Increase your apprenticeship completion rates with practical advice for overcoming common challenges that you and your apprentices may face

Apprenticeship programmes offer incredible opportunities for people to build bright futures, while also offering a solution to growing national skills shortages across multiple sectors. However, despite their strong potential, apprenticeships are suffering from high non-completion rates.

Government figures show that **almost half (47 percent) of apprentices drop out** during their learning journey, or don't make it to end-point assessment (EPA). A report from the think tank EDSK highlighted that over 70 percent of those apprentices who dropped out reported problems with their training programme.

It's a critical issue, and one the government has set out targets to address. As well as introducing a goal to increase apprenticeship achievement rates from 51 percent to 67 percent by 2025, the Department for Education (DfE) has introduced the Accountability Framework which aims to help providers review their own performance, identify potential quality issues and carry out improvements.

Reaching these targets will need a collaborative effort from providers, employers and end-point assessment organisations (EPAOs) from start to finish.

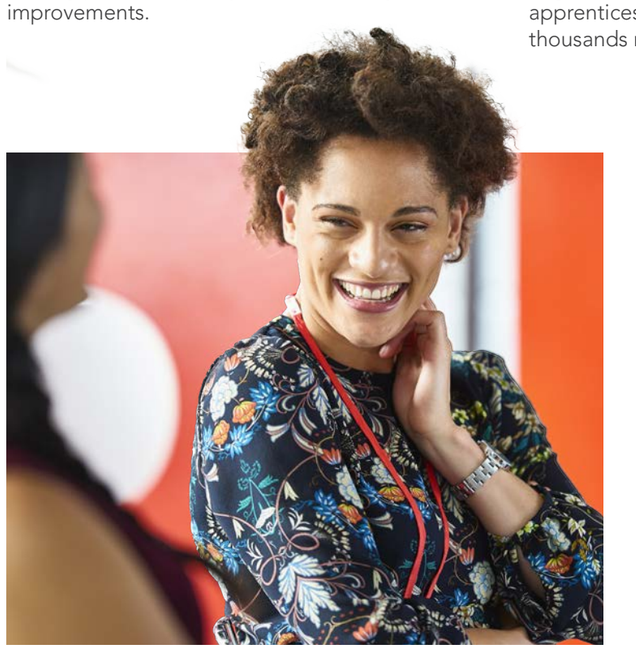
Here to support you and your apprentices

Like you, we believe in the power of apprenticeships. We also understand that giving your apprentices the tools to succeed is your number one priority – and we're here to help you do that.

Securing apprenticeship success requires apprentice support at each stage of the journey. In fact, the St Martin's Group *Apprenticeships Outcomes and Destinations* report identified more direct support as a key factor in reducing apprenticeship withdrawals.

In this guide for training providers and colleges, you'll find expert advice and practical tips designed to help you plan ahead, overcome common challenges, and support your apprentices through their entire journey, from onboarding to EPA.

Together, we can help the next generation of apprentices reach their full potential and strive for thousands more apprenticeship starts that finish.



GOVERNMENT FIGURES SHOW THAT ALMOST HALF (47 PERCENT) OF APPRENTICES DROP OUT DURING THEIR LEARNING JOURNEY, OR DON'T MAKE IT TO END-POINT ASSESSMENT.

GETTING STARTED

Setting your apprentices up for success starts from day one

Naturally, all apprentices want to achieve the best grade possible, and those who have a **greater and more in-depth understanding of their standard appear to achieve better grades.**

On the other hand, a lack of clear communication around what their programme involves has been identified as a contributing factor in apprentice withdrawal. That is why it's so important that apprentices – like any student on any course – are fully aware of the nature and requirements of their programme from the very start.

Every apprentice should have a detailed onboarding with their provider and employer that covers: **an initial assessment, an overview of what their standard is and how it's structured, what's expected of them, and what their EPA will involve.** Having this detailed plan from the outset can help you catch potential issues early before they become a problem later down the line.

Apprentice onboarding checklist

Before the apprenticeship programme gets underway, set up meetings with both your apprentice and their employer to…

- ☑ **Go through the apprenticeship timeline from start to finish**
  Make sure your apprentices are aware of the expected duration of their programme and set clear expectations for what will happen at the key milestones, including on-programme checkpoints, gateway and EPA.

- ☑ **Carry out an initial skills assessment**
  All apprentices need to have an initial assessment, and providers are responsible for managing this. As part of the assessment, a skills scan (including eligibility checks) must be carried out to identify their current knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) against their standard to help ensure that they are on the right programme. This is also the time to check whether your apprentices have or will need to attain other mandatory qualifications like Functional Skills in maths and English, and to discuss reasonable adjustments that might be required across all aspects of the apprenticeship. The results of this assessment should then be used to help shape their learning plan.

- ☑ **Set out an individual learning plan**
  Your learners' individual plans should be tailored to their specific needs based on the pre-determined KSBs and other mandatory training requirements that they will need to evidence at each stage of their programme. It should also reflect how this will be achieved.

- ☑ **Identify where your apprentices can go for guidance and support**
  Whether your apprentice has a question about their KSBs, managing their workload, or EPA preparation, your apprentices should know who they can speak to for support or guidance throughout the programme. This helps create an environment where your apprentices feel safe, comfortable and confident.

- ☑ **Make sure everyone involved knows their roles and responsibilities**
  Outline what you as a provider can support with, versus when apprentices should speak to their line manager. Is there an opportunity for your learners to have a mentor and, if so, who would be best placed and how much support are they able to give?

- ☑ **Share online support and learning resources**
  Discover resources that are available to you throughout this guide for information on learning support, wellbeing and welfare, best practice, and more.

Discover more online tools and downloadable resources to support your on-programme learning.

Apprentice welfare and wellbeing

Apprentices need ongoing support to ensure their wellbeing and welfare needs are being met. It's important that the provider, employer and apprentice take a collective approach from the beginning so that relevant steps can be put in place. This is particularly important for apprentices who may need reasonable adjustments to support their learning.

Work together to:

- Create an environment where apprentices feel comfortable and safe.
- Encourage honest conversations.
- Ensure that your team and employers have the relevant information or training to recognise wellbeing concerns.
- Check that your apprentices are equipped with the knowledge and tools to keep themselves safe, as well as able to identify potential warning signs and take appropriate actions.

For more advice, read the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's Welfare and wellbeing in the apprenticeship guidance.

ON-PROGRAMME LEARNING

How to overcome common challenges and support your apprentices throughout their journey

The on-programme part of an apprenticeship will make up the majority of your apprentice's journey. To help maximise their success, it needs to take shape with the **ultimate end goal of EPA in mind.**

It's the phase when your apprentices need to **develop the relevant knowledge, skills and behaviours for their standard** – alongside any other **mandatory training requirements and soft skills.**

Here we address some of the common challenges that crop up during this phase, and how to help your apprentices overcome them.

THE CHALLENGE:

Apprentices losing motivation or drifting off track

Lasting anything from one to five years, an apprenticeship is a marathon not a sprint so maintaining learner motivation is key. Without regular support and progress check-ins, apprentices may lose interest or lack confidence.

Lack of motivation is reported as one of the factors in apprentices leaving programmes. The St Martin's Group *Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destination* research found that just over a quarter of respondents who withdrew from their programme reported a 'loss of interest or motivation'.

THE SOLUTION:

Schedule in regular, well-structured review meetings encouraging open and honest conversations

The St Martin's Group report also found that regular advice meetings with providers and one-to-ones with line managers are one of the most valuable forms of support for apprentices.

To help your learners stay on track and encourage engagement, plan in regular review meetings with a clear agenda that's aligned with their individual learning plan. Aim for one review session each month. As part of every review meeting, work together to:

- Set out tangible next steps so that your apprentices know where they should be by the next review and have a clear goal in mind.
- Schedule in EPA touchpoints, whether that's mini-knowledge tests or reviewing exemplar materials, to help keep that ultimate goal at the forefront.
- Check in with your apprentices' wellbeing and welfare, discussing any challenges they may be facing so that you can address issues early on.

As much as possible, involve the employer in these sessions to ensure that everyone is on the same page, and to get a progress overview from both sides.

Where you can, make them face-to-face for quality contact time. If they are remote, try to ensure you all have your cameras on.

To reinforce the review outcomes, upload your discussion notes to the e-learning platform, and ask their managers to feed in as well.

Outside of your review meetings, encourage regular communication and drop-ins to demonstrate your commitment and help build your apprentice's confidence.

THE CHALLENGE:

Delays to programme timelines caused by gaps in core KSBs

There are multiple factors that can slow down an apprentice's progress towards their end goal, but one of the main causes is not being in the best job to meet the needs of their apprenticeship standard.

Sometimes learners are put on standards that appear to match the role, but the day-to-day tasks don't meet the KSBs required for EPA. Other times, roles evolve or shift focus, taking learners off in another direction. This can lead to skills gaps and delay your apprentice building up the right evidence they need to succeed.

THE SOLUTION:

Plan in stop-and-check moments to look at skills development against the requirements of their standard

Stay on track for a timely completion by factoring in constant stop-and-check moments with your apprentices to ask the question: 'Are we still working towards the right standard?'

To answer it, check your learner's progress and any evidence collected against the KSBs outlined in their standards – and on their individual learning plan. If the answer is 'no', speak with the employer or adjust the standard to something more suitable.

Also use these moments to check whether your apprentices are developing soft skills that they will need for EPA – for example, presentation skills or time management skills to help them balance work and study for a smoother journey. Identify how you can support them to broaden their skillset and add any relevant steps into their learning plans. These extra checks can also help your learner's achieve higher grades.

Build these stop-and-checks into your regular review meetings so both your apprentice and their line manager are part of the conversation.

IDENTIFY HOW YOU CAN SUPPORT APPRENTICES TO BROADEN THEIR SKILLSET AND ADD ANY RELEVANT STEPS INTO THEIR LEARNING PLANS.

THE CHALLENGE:

Hold-ups reaching gateway linked to late planning for mandatory qualifications and reasonable adjustments

Collecting evidence for additional mandatory training (such as Functional Skills) and planning for reasonable adjustments can take longer to organise and evidence than expected.

For example, as learners reach gateway, one of the common blockers we see is apprentices still waiting to sit Functional Skills exams in maths and English, waiting on results, or missing evidence (such as GCSE exemption certificates) to prove they already have the qualifications.

THE SOLUTION:

Start planning for assessments and uploading evidence as soon as possible

Although gateway and EPA might seem far off at the beginning of your apprentice's journey, plans for any mandatory training requirements for their standard and reasonable adjustments should be in place as soon as possible.

From the initial skills scan, you will know whether your apprentice needs to sign up for any learning programmes or assessments, or what certificates will be needed to prove their existing qualifications and any reasonable adjustments. Raise this early and add checks into your regular review meetings so everyone knows what's required, what evidence is already filed away in their portfolio, and any potential blockers.

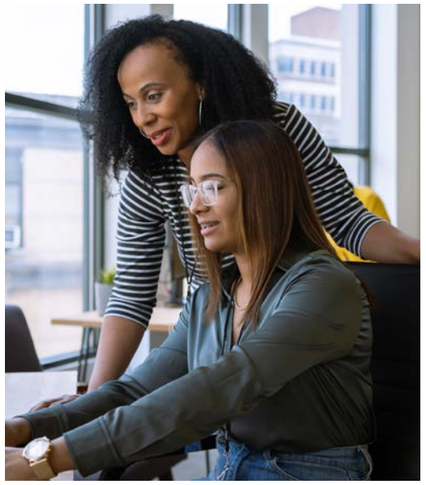
ASSESSMENT

Top tips and best practice to help maximise apprentice success at gateway and EPA

EPA is perhaps the most critical part of the apprenticeship journey, determining the ultimate success of the programme. And yet, we see many apprentices not being adequately prepared by the time they reach this final milestone.

In the previous section of this guide, we explored ways you can help improve your apprentice's EPA-readiness with proactive planning during the on-programme learning journey – from making sure they are hitting all the KSBs to preparing evidence for other mandatory training requirements.

Here we look at some of the common challenges that crop up as learners hit gateway and EPA, and what you can do to mitigate these.



THE CHALLENGE:

Apprentices lacking confidence or feeling under-prepared on EPA day

As with all assessments, some EPA anxiety is natural, but this can spiral if apprentices are not practically or emotionally prepared with an idea of what to expect on the day. This can have an impact on mental health, confidence and apprenticeship success if it's not addressed.

THE SOLUTION:

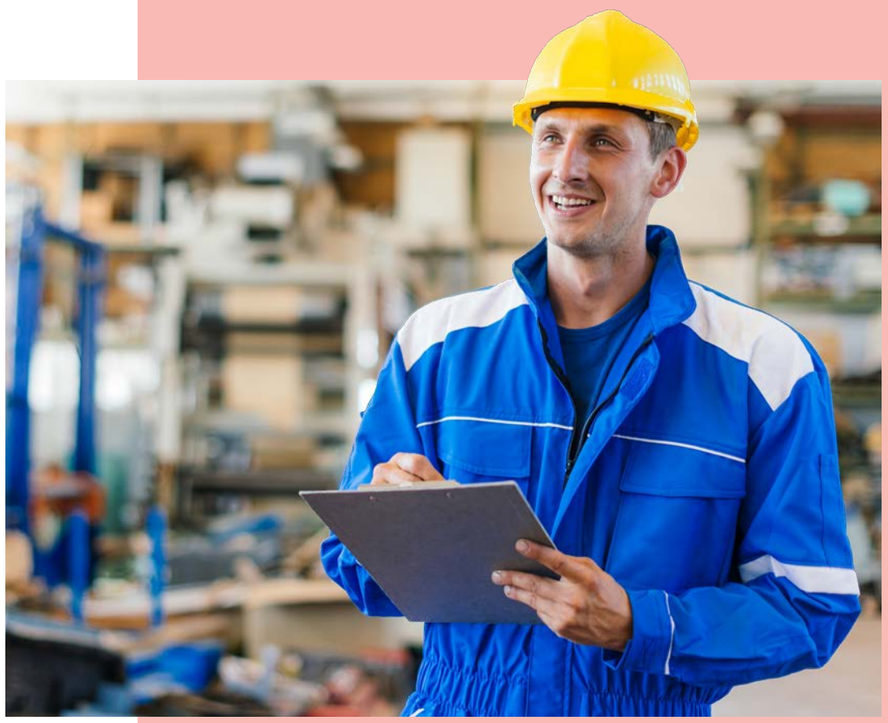
Schedule in mock assessments to help manage expectations and engage with your EPAO early on

EPA looks very different for each standard with a mix of assessment methods including knowledge tests, presentations, professional discussions, and observation in the workplace. As with any assessment, to make sure learners feel prepared and confident, practice makes perfect.

Mocks can give learners a feel of how their EPA will take shape. They are also an opportunity to identify and feedback on areas that are particularly strong, as well as areas where more work is needed.

The sooner you, the employer and your end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) start helping apprentices plan for these practice tests the better. As you start to think about gateway, ensure your apprentices are allowed enough time to build regular mocks into their workload. You can also add mini-knowledge tests and presentations into their programme so that they get plenty of practice along the way.

Engaging with your EPAO early can also help your teams and apprentices feel more confident about the expectations of EPA. Aim to register with your EPAO at least six months before gateway. This gives everyone time to familiarise themselves with the platforms, access learning materials like LIEPA reports so you know what good looks like, and to meet the teams who will be supporting you throughout.



Gateway checklist

By the time the apprentices are going through gateway, they should know…

- ☑ The dates they are looking to do their assessment.
- ☑ Where the event will be held.
- ☑ What resources or equipment they need.
- ☑ What evidence needs to be submitted to their EPA platform.

THE CHALLENGE:

Uncertainty about what to do or where to go on EPA day

Even with a good number of practice tests under the belt, one thing that we see is specific requirements and logistics for the event being overlooked. This can create a range of problems including lost time, difficult test conditions, or needing to delay the event altogether. While this happens across the board, it's more prominent with onsite events where lots of physical planning is involved.

THE SOLUTION:

Double-check everything is set up by the conclusion of gateway

As the final review before EPA, all of these details should be checked and double-checked by the completion of gateway. Create a checklist to make sure all the key questions around resource, equipment, and location have been addressed.

For example, with an onsite EPA: Who will host it – will you do it at the workplace or in a separate venue? What would be the best time, and why? Will any ID be required for entry? Will you need sign-off to use certain tools? Are there any key stakeholders that need to be present? Is there any equipment that needs to be built or bought?

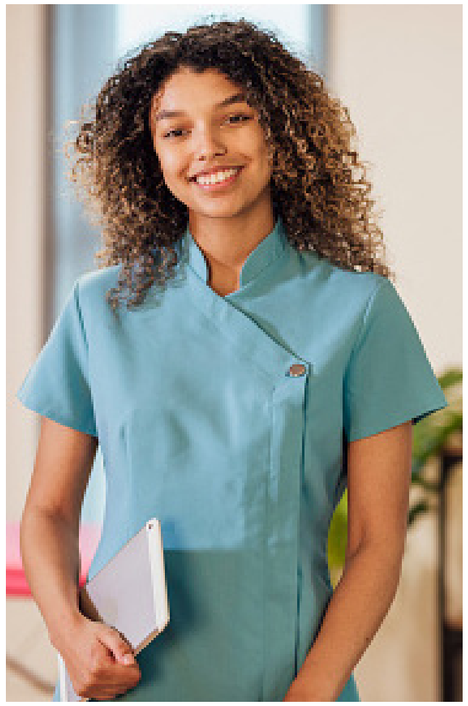
If it's a remote EPA: Is the room quiet and distraction free? Does your apprentice have a computer with a working camera?

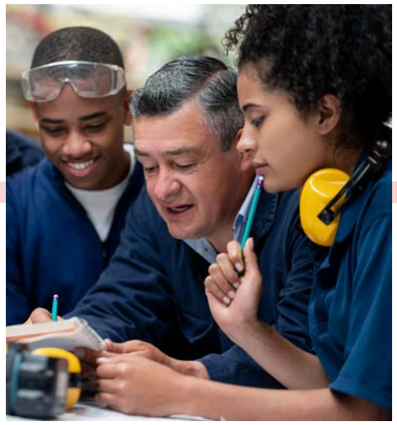
Use the gateway meeting to plan efficiently and effectively so there aren't any surprises on the day. Make it clear between your team, the employer and the apprentice who will be responsible for managing what.

4 quick tips for a smoother EPA

Ease administration burden and maximise apprentice success with these best practice tips

- **Register with your EPAO early**
  Ideally around six months before gateway.
- **Encourage teams and apprentices to engage with your EPAO**
  To maximise access to online and in-person support.
- **Clearly define EPA roles and responsibilities**
  Make sure that everyone knows what they should be doing in the lead-up – from uploading evidence to getting everything booked for the day. If possible, appoint an EPA co-ordinator.
- **Plan external quality assurance activities as early as possible**
  To ensure that you have the best chance of getting Direct Claim Status (DCS) granted, it is recommended that any external quality assurance (EQA) visits are planned at least three months in advance of apprentices reaching gateway.





Tap into the knowledge and experience of our specialist teams

City & Guilds have a wide range of specialists on hand to help you plan and deliver apprenticeships and EPA. We take pride in a personal approach with our EPA specialists and dedicated Technical Advisors (TA) for each sector, whose role is exclusively to offer industry and education expertise.

Our EPA Partnership Managers support customers with the EPA process and provide guidance to ensure a smooth journey, and we have team of Digital Solutions Managers to help you make the most of our platforms.

SUPPORT RESOURCES

Access online and downloadable resources to help you plan ahead for success at each stage of the apprenticeship journey

Digital platforms

EPA Pro

Our online administration and learning support tool is designed to give you and your apprentices better clarity and control throughout their entire programme, as well as housing everything needed for the EPA journey under one roof.

Build your own profile to get the most out of tailored learning support, including EPA journey mapping to trace the key dates and progress from start to finish and role-specific support resources such as activity sheets, checklists, and exemplar materials. You can also use sample questions and answers to help learners understand the grading criteria and level of detail required to achieve a distinction.
Learn more about EPA Pro

SmartScreen

Access enhanced support resources for tutors and learners including schemes of work, lesson plans, handouts, worksheets, activity sheets, PowerPoint presentations, and sample questions.
Learn more about SmartScreen

Downloadable learning materials

City & Guilds EPA packs

Find all the information related to your apprentice's specific standard, and the KSBs that will be assessed. Available for all City & Guilds' standards.
The packs are available to download in EPA Pro

Apprenticeship training manuals

A task-based manual that gives full coverage of the standard with exercises and tasks that prepare apprentices for assessment. It's specifically useful for standards without the on-programme qualification.
Available to download in SmartScreen

Lead Independent End-Point Assessment (LIEPA) reports

LIEPA reports contain insights from previous EPA experiences, including lessons learned, trends, tips on what good looks like, and common reasons for failure. Use them to refine apprenticeship delivery and improve success rates.
Available to download in EPA Pro

IfATE EPA plans

Access assessment plans for all apprenticeship standards on the Institute for Apprenticeships & Technical Education Assessment (IfATE) website.
Search for your standard on the IfATE website

Support and best practice guides

Raising the Standards – IfATE's Guide to Quality Apprenticeships

A series of guides to help apprentices, employers and providers improve the quality of apprenticeships. Topics include induction, training, preparation for end-point assessment, welfare and wellbeing, and equity, diversity and inclusion.
Access the guide

Qualifications

Functional Skills qualifications

Our Functional Skills qualifications help apprentices build their confidence and knowledge so they can gain the required level of maths and English for gateway.
Explore our qualifications

Research and insights

Apprenticeship Outcomes and Destinations

The St Martin's Group and Learning and Work Institute's report investigates why a large number of apprentices do not complete their journey, and suggests steps to resolve this.
Access the report

Levying Up: Delivering sustainable skills

A City & Guilds research report in collaboration with The 5% Club highlights the challenges employers are facing when engaging with the apprenticeship system and making the most of their levy.
Access the report

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