

EPA Spotlight on Best Practice

EPA Competency Based Interviews and Professional Discussion, with Karen Egan, Technical Advisor

In our previous quarterly update, I shared some thoughts and insights around best practice for EPA portfolios, so this time I want to focus on interviews and professional discussion.

As you will be aware both Assessment Methods are within the Management Standards' EPA and we have seen some great practice but experienced some challenges too. So, I will share those with you along with some guidance to help your apprentices pass first time.

Competency Based Interviews (CBI)

Preparation is key and we see the best performance in this area when the apprentice is well prepared for this assessment by the training provider. They will have their portfolio ready and organised for reference during the CBI. Those apprentices who have had guided practice prior to undertaking the EPA CBI tend to perform well, linking knowledge and skills to experiences within the working environment.

The apprentice must be able to confidently discuss, with several different work-based examples of how they have applied their skills in each area of the standard. They should include their approach and behaviours in sufficient depth to meet the criteria.

It is important that training providers ensure their apprentices are in role and can produce the required evidence to meet the standard. Some apprentices have raised concerns during the CBI assessment that they are not in a team leader/supervisor role and have had insufficient exposure or experience to support their claim for competence with an over reliance on knowledge. Skills areas are therefore lacking sufficient and relevant product evidence. This is particularly evident in people management, project management and finance skills.

Professional Discussion (PD)

Apprentices do well if they have completed sufficient Continuous Professional Development (CPD) and clearly understand the impact upon their own role and responsibilities, but also understand the tasks they have undertaken to meet development needs. Again, apprentices do particularly well if they have practiced professional discussion while on-programme and their CPD log is available during the PD for them to reference.

We've found on occasions that apprentices are not fully aware of the differences between CPD and their Personal Development Plan (PDP). The apprentice should have a detailed CPD log to refer to within the professional discussion, so they can recall their activities and how they have reflected throughout the entire apprenticeship.

The apprentice should concentrate on themselves and their own impact rather the wider team, for example, using the word 'I' rather than 'we'.

Some-apprentices also lack general self-development awareness and have little evidence to discuss their continued professional development. Training providers should work with employers to ensure that this is sufficiently covered.

A few helpful pointers would be to make sure candidates are familiar with remote meetings/interviews, this helps to remove a barrier to performance and allows the candidate to focus on the actual assessment activity.

Also, ensuring candidates are clear about the purpose of these activities helps and the professional discussion will be a discussion, not a Q&A, focussed on **their** development, not the team's development.