



Our grand design – working with BCS

By Chiraag Swaly, Tech Product Manager at QA

Grand Designs is a big deal at QA, the property programme produced by Channel 4 is a “must watch” across our offices. If you aren’t familiar, the show centres on exceptional houses being built or renovated. As the audience we get to see these elaborate structures take shape, from conception to realisation – it’s brilliant.

The amount of work which goes into these developments is, as you would imagine, astounding. However, even the most meticulously planned venture is not devoid of a few hiccups and this is often the make or break point for most projects. The owners are faced with a choice.

Route one – play the blame game, “the builder didn’t do X, so we can’t do Y” or “the electrician has messed this up and now our timings are all off” or even “the architect has got this all wrong – the dimensions are completely off”.

Then there is the other route, requiring willingness from all parties to put the goal at the centre of everything done. This path of understanding breeds fairness and feasibility. These projects get completed more proficiently and don’t leave anyone with a bad feeling.

We have come to a similar route with BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT. No, we aren’t collaboratively building a subterranean learning academy from reclaimed moss. Our ‘Grand Design’ focuses on the new apprenticeship standards, still new in the market and the end point assessments our learners must pass to complete their apprenticeships.

In the new world of apprenticeship standards, apprentices, along with having to do knowledge assessments, are now externally assessed by an Assessment Organisation (AO) – in our case this is BCS.

In the past, with apprenticeship frameworks, training providers assessed learners themselves – there was no end point assessment (EPA). Upon completion and passing of their knowledge and competency elements, along with functional skills, they completed their apprenticeship – there was no additional assessment requirement and the training provider alone was responsible for the assessment.

In the new EPA process, we, as a training provider, facilitate the learner journey and ensure we work together with the apprentice and employer for readiness for the EPA. For all tech

apprenticeship standards, this involves submitting a summative portfolio and knowledge assessment certificates, followed consisting of a synoptic project and an interview, of which the apprentice must do to complete their apprenticeship.

We started enrolling new starters on our Level 3 Infrastructure Technician Apprenticeship in June 2016. Doing this for the first time, we had no idea what a synoptic project would look like, what the logistics would be, or how the interview would take place – it was all going to be done externally for the first time by the AO, BCS. It was an exciting yet daunting time with lots of unknowns.

We attended meetings to understand the new EPA process. It required constant communication between BCS and QA, and lots of conversations to understand how our own processes would work to achieve EPA readiness for our learners and employers, and how this process would then scale as the apprenticeship standards grew.

With any EPA, having the right support for the apprentice is crucial.

We did this through a two-step process. Firstly, preparation prior to the synoptic project and secondly, individualised support around interview preparation. The first QA apprentices who went through this new process felt this worked well and enjoyed the interview. The result was two distinctions from two young apprentices, who were amongst the first in England to have achieved the new Level 3 Infrastructure Technician Apprenticeship Standard.

The unknown EPA process from a year previous is now much clearer, and we have a defined approach we can use.

The new apprenticeship standards have been a significant change in comparison with the previous apprenticeship frameworks. The EPAs had been an unknown and this is still the case in many new apprenticeship standards, as more and more are being developed.

Having been through this process with several learners now, QA have come to a several conclusions:

- As an AO, BCS have a clear understanding of the requirements of the EPA. Their design of the process is a robust and fair method of determining whether a learner has met the requirements and we have full confidence in BCS with regards to this process.
- The EPA process requires a different mind-set. Active collaboration with the AO and a strong internal process from the training provider (in this case QA) supporting the learner and employer through the EPA.
- The EPA is not just an event. It is something you work towards and having a readiness plan is needed. This ranges from logistics, to the actual readiness for a very thorough EPA process.
- The new EPAs clearly demonstrate that passing it successfully is a true measure of competence and one that will significantly improve the positive impact that apprenticeships are having in the tech industry.

We are already seeing the benefits this approach has had on our learners undertaking the new digital and technology apprenticeship standards, and we look forward to planning our next Grand Design with BCS.

QA Apprenticeships

About QA

QA is the UK's leading learning organisation providing training, consultancy, apprenticeships and post graduate degrees on a range of technical, business and leadership subjects. With over 22 UK training centres – including their Apprenticeships and Consulting Academies – and a range of online learning options, QA offer an unparalleled set of learning solutions to both private and public sector organisations.

Come and see us at our stand at the upcoming [BCS apprenticeship evening](#) on Tuesday 6th February for more advice on the new apprenticeship standards and End Point Assessments.

qa.com/apprenticeships