

THE PROVIDER INSIDER

INSIGHTS INTO FURTHER EDUCATION

AN INTERVIEW WITH NATIONAL BUSINESS COLLEGE

This blog brings you an interview with National Business College who are a Apprenticeship training provider specialising in Administration, Customer Service, Team Leading and Management apprenticeships. This blog is about their experiences of completing remote EPA.

WHAT DIFFERENCES ARE THERE IN THE REMOTE EPA?

For the customer service practitioner, the observation had to be changed to use Lifesize which is a secure video conferencing system which Highfield are using for remote EPA. To enable a remote observation to take place another member of staff is required to operate the camera for 90 minutes which is time consuming and takes away another member of the employers staff team. Professional discussion and question and answers was fully completed remotely through the same system.

WHAT WORKED WELL?

Highfields had already organised all contacts and system requirement checks for the learner for the Lifesize system so that they could be well prepared and ready to take the EPA. The communication from them was great to prepare for it.

ARE THERE ANY AREAS YOU ARE SEEING WHICH NEED IMPROVING AND WHY?

Following this we know that we need to adapt our systems and processes for remote observations to ensure that we conduct mock EPA correctly to thoroughly prepare apprentices for this brand-new EPA process.

WHAT HAVE BEEN THE MAIN CHALLENGES OF REMOTE EPA?

Working with AO to get permission from Ofqual as this was time consuming in the beginning which delayed things. Also securing the employers agreement for another member of staff to be involved in following with the camera to allow remote observation. However, now we know we can prepare well in advance for this with employers.

HOW HAVE LEARNERS BEEN RESPONDING TO THE REMOTE EPA?

The learner was keen to complete the remote EPA. There was only one link issue initially which was quickly rectified, and the EPA was really supportive during the process and understood how roles have changed during Covid. Following the experience the learner stated, "I thought that the remote EPA generally went well. Although at first, the link/number code given was for the incorrect assessor who didn't answer on the first few attempts on calling them, we eventually got an answer and was advised to contact Highfields. Highfields and the staff at NBC were very helpful and resolved the issue quickly and then we received the correct code for the assigned assessor who commenced the observation. He turned his camera off for the practical observation so you couldn't actually see him during this which relieved some of the pressure. Overall, the whole experience was not as daunting as I first thought despite the initial stress of not being able to connect with the correct assessor."



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HOW HAVE STAFF RESPONDED TO THE REMOTE EPA?

The team has responded well and now that we have had the experience, we know exactly how we need to adapt systems and our approach for remote mock EPA to fully prepare learners for the remote EPA.

WHAT HELPS TO MAKE THIS A SMOOTH PROCESS FOR THE LEARNER AND STAFF?

Communication with employer as to what is required from them so they fully understand the requirement of an additional staff member to record and follow the learner as well as the need for other exams to take place in the learners home rather than the work place. This helps them to prepare for releasing staff and the durations they need releasing for.

IS THERE ANY ADVICE YOU CAN PROVIDE TO HELP PROVIDERS?

Talk to your EPAO as soon as possible to ensure you are aware of the systems to be used and you can be fully prepared well in advance as can your learners and employers. Keep communication channels open and make it as transparent as possible for employer and learner - clarity is key for all elements of the EPA and timings involved in the process for it to run smoothly.

Ensure to test systems the week before to ensure that if there are any issues it can be addressed prior to the day.



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