

UN Human Rights Council 49: UK statement for the Universal Periodic Review Adoption – Hungary

World news story

The UK submitted this written statement during the Universal Periodic Review Adoption for Hungary.



The United Kingdom welcomes Hungary's engagement with the Universal Periodic Review.

We also commend Hungary for their humanitarian response at the Ukrainian border in the wake of Russia's unprovoked, premeditated assault against a sovereign democratic state.

We welcome Hungary's continued commitment to eliminate human trafficking and their acceptance of our recommendation to create a specialised framework for identifying and assisting child victims of human trafficking. We hope Hungary will implement this as soon as possible.

We regret that Hungary did not accept our recommendation to repeal discriminatory legislation, including the 2020 amendments restricting

adoptions for same-sex couples. We remain concerned by a series of measures introduced in Hungary in the past few years that discriminate against the LGBT+ community.

We are also disappointed that Hungary did not support our recommendation to introduce legal safeguards to make the Media Council more pluralistic and free from political interference. It is vital that Hungary has a varied media landscape, and that all media regulatory bodies are independent.

The UK looks forward to our continued collaboration with Hungary. We encourage the Government to submit a mid-term report to provide an update on progress.

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[Catherine Large's speech: Annual Apprenticeship Conference 2022](#)

Hello everyone, thank you for inviting me. I've been working on, within, and around, the apprenticeships system for the past 15 years, and it's good to see so many familiar faces in the audience.

As the qualifications regulator, it is our job to make sure that the apprenticeship end-point assessments that are in our purview are awarded consistently and fairly, with the apprentice's interests protected as a priority. It is from this position that I bring you some perspectives today.

I'd like to focus on 3 key things.

Firstly, the value that high-quality assessment can bring to apprenticeships. I'm keen to consider some of the changes that have come into effect in recent years, and where they might take the sector next.

Secondly, and building on this, I'd like to reflect on the organisations delivering apprenticeship assessments. You will be aware that end point assessment organisations (EPAOs) were asked in 2020 to apply to be regulated by Ofqual, as part of the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education's programme to streamline the quality assurance process. I'll provide an update today on the progress we've made so far, and what the market might look like in the future.

And finally, I'd like to talk about our approach to regulating delivery, to ensure that apprentices get tested fairly, in a way that produces a result that employers can rely on. Where there is a choice, we will choose the route that best protects the apprentice – that, as we see it, is what our statute

empowers us to do. This complements the work of the Institute who bring the perspective of employers. Working together, in strategic partnership, we can uphold quality.

1. High-quality assessment

So, to start with, let's consider the role that high-quality assessment can play in apprenticeships. The reforms enacted have made the assessment approach for all apprenticeships synoptic, so apprentices are assessed holistically at the end point, rather than continuously throughout. All apprentices are now independently assessed at the end of their training, rather than only assessed by their centres. New grading approaches have also been introduced, to enable employers to differentiate better between apprentices entering the labour market. Overall, the reforms have aimed to introduce an assessment that truly assesses what an apprentice is capable of doing at the conclusion of their training.

We have now reviewed a proportion of the end-point assessments currently available in the market, delivered by a range of organisations. We are therefore getting a good idea of how EPAOs develop assessments, and how assessment could be improved per apprenticeship standard. To give you a few examples:

- The assessment plan, developed by employers and approved by the Institute, is an important blueprint. We would expect organisations to bring their own sectoral and technical assessment design expertise to bear in interpreting it.
- Overall, where we see better quality assessment, it is where EPAOs have considered where materials for different audiences – training providers, assessors, apprentices themselves – have to align and do not contradict each other, when a clear and simple method of grade aggregation is supplied, and when a clear and robust quality assurance process is in place.
- We expect EPAOs to take in to account the relevant employment context in their assessment design, as set out in the assessment plan, and to make sure that questions aren't focused on a part of the industry that the apprentice may not have experience of where a standard covers multiple job roles.
- We expect multiple choice tests to provide only one possible correct answer where there is one mark available in the mark scheme. EPAOs must provide enough information to allow assessors to apply the mark scheme accurately and consistently.
- We want EPAOs to set clear parameters and expectations for how

observations should be conducted, and to include some exemplification of the grading criteria to show what an assessor should be looking for in practice. We want to see examples provided of what an apprentice might do to demonstrate the different grade criteria.

- For assessments that use observation, and/or a portfolio, showcase or journals, we'd like to see the expectations of apprentices set out clearly, for example with the number of pieces of evidence required, the types of evidence to include and format required, and to have a clear and effective process for authenticating this evidence.

These are all examples of good practice to inform assessment development, which I know all of you will know about already, which have a direct read-across to the regulations that awarding organisations need to adhere to. We have published these examples as findings from our technical evaluation process, and it is all available to you if you search for Ofqual and apprenticeships on GOV.UK. The team are here delivering a workshop on this today too.

In the future, we're looking forward to how the assessment reforms will give us more information about apprentices as cohorts of learners. As we collect more outcomes data, it will be interesting to see how grade profiles continue to mature in different sectors as the numbers of assessments increase, and how differentiation through grading is meeting the expectations of employers.

We are looking forward to researching more deeply how different assessment methods are used, as per broader work we are doing on vocational and technical qualifications, such as our recent 'CASLO' research that some of you will be aware of. We are keen, for example, to understand how best to assess 'soft skills', behaviours – the 'highly valued competencies' that employers demand. These are inherently difficult to assess but incredibly important to get right for employers.

And we are looking forward to the benefits that taking a more consistent approach to assessment can bring to individual industries and sectors, where delivery was perhaps patchy before.

2. Organisations

Moving on then to the organisations who deliver apprenticeship assessment, many of whom are in the audience and on stage today.

The decision that the Institute made in 2020 to ensure that all apprenticeship assessments are awarded by organisations that are subject to statutory regulation was an important development, an underpinning development. We are delighted that so many end-point assessment organisations, of all shapes and sizes, have met the necessarily high bar we set for entering the regulated community of awarding organisations in recent months. We continue to carefully evaluate applications from others, and to give proactive support and feedback. The more organisations engage with us,

the more we can help them understand the process so, if this applies to you, please do make sure you're keeping in close contact with your assigned Ofqual relationship manager.

By way of a specific update on progress, 111 new EPAOs have applied for Ofqual recognition to-date, and we are expecting a further 20 to apply by 16 May. We have recognised 41 new EPAOs so far, including 19 who did this on their first attempt. We have never received and approved so many applications for recognition in Ofqual's 12-year history. This has been done without lowering the bar on quality.

This is not simply growth from already well-established awarding organisations, but organisations that are specialists in their respective fields, that have demonstrated they can meet our requirements, and we welcome them into the regulated community. They range from niche organisations like the Institute of Cast Metal Engineers, recognised for a single apprenticeship standard – the Metal Casting, Foundry and Patternmaking Technician, to those that are broader in scope offering popular standards such as Business Administrator and Associate Project Manager.

Together with established awarding organisations already in regulation, this brings the total number of organisations offering regulated end-point assessments to over 100, with many applications still to be considered.

There are 19 EPAOs who submitted their application by the January deadline, who are waiting for a decision on their latest application to us as we speak. They – you – will all have heard from us by 1 April.

The Education and Skills Funding Agency will be taking steps to remove end point assessment organisations from its register if they are not recognised by Ofqual after two applications. These organisations will have not yet demonstrated that they meet our requirements by providing sufficient evidence to us, almost two years after the announcement was first made. If that sounds a bit tough then it all comes back, for me, to the goal of protecting the quality of assessments for apprentices and their current and potential employers. There is absolutely nothing stopping organisations applying to us at any point in the future, as many times as they like.

I am alive to the risks in the market as it changes, and we remain in close dialogue with the ESFA and the Institute as they manage these developments. Our work together so far has brought more than 90% of apprentices in our first phase into the protection of regulation. We are united in our aims for quality and will continue to prioritise the apprentices themselves as we progress through the programme.

I'm confident that training providers and employers will continue to have a thriving market of end point assessment organisations to work with in the future. And, of course, I highly recommend that anyone makes an Ofqual-recognised awarding organisation their EPA provider of choice from this point on.

3. Regulatory approach

Finally today, I'd like to just touch briefly on the work that Ofqual is doing to regulate end-point assessments in delivery. Apprenticeship assessment is a particular form of assessment. Like many vocational qualifications, it is not done en masse in an exam hall but in the field, in workplaces, on site, and at multiple different points in the year. The delivery approach has changed following the reforms, with assessment now required to be delivered independently, outside the centre's purview, with appropriate quality assurance in place.

Our regulatory approach therefore also has to be different and tailored to this unique set of circumstances. Over the past year we have established our new field team, whose job it is to engage EPAOs directly and take time to understand their approaches to assessment. An important and growing part of this team's role is to travel to those places where assessments are carried out and observe apprentices being assessed. From manufacturing environments to hair salons, the team has been welcomed by both EPAOs and – most crucially – employers, who understand how important it is for Ofqual to see assessments first hand, so we can properly appreciate the hard work both they and the apprentice put into a meaningful apprenticeship programme. Through this work our aim is to better understand the quality of the assessments being offered to apprentices and their experience of them, and to support EPAOs with continuous improvement.

We are also establishing specific sector fora for EPAOs to collectively share and address issues. We have seen a real willingness to engage, and to work together to resolve problems, for example the EPAOs offering assessments in financial services, who recently agreed to work jointly on common grade descriptors. We have seen a welcome readiness from EPAOs to adjust their approach to accommodate common practice. This is critical to establishing consistency across EPAOs and strengthening comparability for apprentices and employers. We also have a close feedback loop with the Institute, to make sure that any adjustments needed to apprenticeship standards and assessment plans are fed back and acted on.

We call this collaborative working with awarding organisations co-regulation. Yes, we are the regulator, and yes, we have rules that they/you have to comply with. But there is no reason not to work co-operatively, if you have quality as your shared goal, and the interests of the apprentices themselves as your priority.

Conclusion

To conclude, therefore, I would just say one thing. We are clearly motivated by improving quality in the apprenticeship assessment system and, if you are too, please do talk to us. There are many ways you can get involved in our work, whether as a sector expert helping with our evaluations and observations, as an assessment expert informing our research, as a training provider on our centre reference group, or as an employer or apprentice providing us with feedback about how the system is working for you. We want

you to help us continue to ensure that the assessments taken by apprentices and used by employers are as valid and reliable as they can possibly be.

Thank you.

Joint Communiqué of the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference

The Government of Ireland was represented by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Simon Coveney TD. The Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland was represented by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, The Rt Hon Brandon Lewis CBE MP, and the Minister of State for Northern Ireland, The Rt Hon Conor Burns MP.

The Conference was established under Strand Three of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement to “promote bilateral co-operation at all levels on all matters of mutual interest within the competence of the UK and Irish Governments”.

The Conference discussed the following:

British- Irish Cooperation

The Irish and UK Governments discussed how the British-Irish Intergovernmental Conference can contribute to the development of the broader British-Irish relationship over the coming years. There was agreement on the need for close collaboration between our two countries, as we address current and future challenges, as was discussed at the recent meeting between An Taoiseach Micheál Martin and Prime Minister Boris Johnson.

The Conference discussed potential synergies between the UK Levelling Up initiatives in Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and Ireland’s National Development Plan 2021-2030. The Conference also discussed the ongoing economic cooperation which is taking place at national and regional levels.

Political Stability

The Conference noted, with regret, the developments at Stormont since it last met in December. The UK and Irish Governments reaffirmed their commitment to the full functioning of all of the political institutions established by the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement, including the North South Ministerial Council, and the importance of respecting the Agreement in all of its strands.

The Conference noted the importance of addressing the outstanding issues in the context of the Northern Ireland Protocol which is currently subject to

continuing engagement between the EU and the UK.

The Irish Government and the UK Government provided an update on their respective commitments under the New Decade, New Approach agreement, which restored the institutions in January 2020.

The Conference agreed to continue close co-operation in accordance with the three-stranded approach established in the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement.

Security Co-operation

The Conference examined the current security situation in both jurisdictions. Both the UK Government and the Irish Government noted the importance of the ongoing high level of co-operation in tackling terrorism, paramilitarism and associated criminality. They considered the fourth report of the Independent Reporting Commission (IRC) and its recommendations. The Irish Government and UK Government confirmed the intention to renominate Mitchell Reiss and Tim O'Connor to the Commission for a further period of appointment, and noted the NI Executive's renomination of John McBurney and Monica McWilliams.

Legacy

The Conference discussed the legacy of Northern Ireland's past, reflecting on views provided during the engagement process and next steps.

The UK and Irish Governments also discussed issues of concern in respect to a number of individual legacy cases.

Rights and Citizenship Matters

The Conference discussed the vital importance of the Common Travel Area arrangements and the need for the Irish Government and the UK Government to continue to work together on CTA immigration matters and to uphold the reciprocal rights and privileges British and Irish citizens have long enjoyed.

The Conference also discussed recent developments and legislation relevant to the implementation of the rights and citizenship provisions of the Belfast / Good Friday Agreement.

Future Meetings

It was agreed that the Conference should meet again in the coming months.

[Chancellor announces tax cuts to ease](#)

cost of living pressures in Scotland

- Chancellor announces Spring Statement tax cut for 2.4 million Scottish workers through rise in National Insurance thresholds – saving the typical employee over £330 a year
- Unveiling plans to give families further help with the cost of living, Rishi Sunak also slashes fuel duty on petrol and diesel by 5p per litre for the next 12 months
- Spring Statement also sets out measures to help businesses boost investment, innovation, and growth – including a £1,000 increase to Employment Allowance to benefit around half a million SMEs across the UK
- The UK Government is providing an additional £45 million to the Scottish Government next year as a result of measures announced by the Chancellor today.

Rishi Sunak announced that National Insurance starting thresholds will rise to £12,570 from July, meaning hard-working people across the UK will keep more of what they earn before they start paying personal taxes.

The cut, worth over £6 billion, will benefit 2.4 million working people in Scotland with a typical employee saving over £330 a year, whilst the typical self-employed person will save over £250. This means the UK now has some of the most generous tax thresholds in the world.

Mr Sunak also announced that fuel duty for petrol and diesel will be cut by 5p per litre from 6pm tonight (23 March) to help drivers across the UK with rising costs. Worth £2.4 billion, this is the biggest cut ever on all fuel duty rates and means a one-car family will now save on average £100.

As a result of a cut to the basic rate of income tax for savings income, taxpayers in Scotland will see benefits worth £3 million. As other income tax rates are devolved in Scotland, the Scottish Government's funding is automatically increased as a result of this tax cut as set out in the agreed Fiscal Framework. This is initially worth £350 million in 2024-25.

The Chancellor also set out a series of measures to help businesses boost investment, innovation, and growth – including a £1,000 increase to Employment Allowance to benefit around half a million businesses.

As a result of measures in this Spring Statement the UK Government is providing the Scottish Government with an additional £45 million through the Barnett formula next year.

Chancellor Rishi Sunak said:

We're slashing taxes for millions of hard-working people in Scotland, getting pounds in people's pockets and helping pay cheques to stretch further – from July more than 2.4 million in Scotland will get a tax cut with the typical employee keeping £330 more each year.

By cutting fuel duty, we're making it cheaper for people in Scotland every time they go to the pump, which together with the freeze means people save £100 per car on average a year.

We're boosting small business growth by increasing the Employment Allowance – a tax cut worth up to £1,000 for thousands of businesses.

Scottish Secretary Alister Jack said:

Measures announced by the Chancellor will help address the big issues facing people in Scotland and right across the UK.

Families across the country are struggling with the cost of living. The reduction in fuel duty, zero VAT on green home improvements, and a tax cut for low and middle earners will help them with these growing pressures.

And an extra £45 million for the Scottish Government will allow them to provide additional support to the most vulnerable families over the coming months.

The Chancellor also reiterated our steadfast support for the people of Ukraine. I know people across Scotland will stand with him on that.

These are undoubtedly challenging times, but action taken by the Chancellor in the Spring Statement will help the UK Government build a stronger, more secure economy for everyone.

To grow the world's very best talent in AI, the Government will partner with industry and academia to create 1,000 new AI PhDs. The Government will invest £117m to create PhDs across the UK at Centres for Doctoral Training, building on the existing three sites in Scotland. This will train a new generation of AI researchers who will develop and use AI in areas such as healthcare, climate change and creating new commercial opportunities.

Delivering the statement, the Chancellor made clear that our sanctions against Russia will not be cost-free for people at home, and that Putin's invasion presents a risk to our economic recovery – as it does to countries all around the world.

However, announcing the further measures to help people deal with rising costs, he said the extra support could only be provided because of the UK's strong economy and the tough but responsible decisions taken to rebuild our fiscal resilience.

The immediate financial support for people and businesses comes as part of a wider tax plan announced by the Chancellor that will create better conditions for growth and will share proceeds from growth more fairly – ensuring people can keep more of what they earn.

Mr Sunak also announced that the Scottish Government will receive £41 million more funding as there will be an extra £500 million for the Household Support Fund, which doubles its total amount to £1 billion to support the most vulnerable families with their essentials over the coming months. The Chancellor also reduced the VAT on energy saving materials such as solar panels, heating pumps and roof insulation from 5% to zero, helping families become more energy-efficient.

This cost of living support comes on top of the measures that the Chancellor has already announced over the recent months to support families. This includes an over £9 billion energy bill rebate package, worth up to £350 each for around 28 million households, an increase to the National Living Wage, worth £1,000 for full time workers, and a cut to the Universal Credit taper, worth £1,000 for 2 million families.

Further announcements

The Spring Statement also confirms that:

- A new Efficiency and Value for Money Committee will be set up to cut £5.5 billion worth of cross-Whitehall waste – with savings to be used to fund public services.
- £50 million new funding to create a Public Sector Fraud Authority to hold departments to account for their counter-fraud performance and to help them identify, seize and recover fraudsters money.
- Local residents across the UK will benefit from a fresh set of infrastructure projects as we open the second round of the £4.8 billion Levelling Up Fund. It will continue to focus on regeneration, transport and cultural investments.

Further information

Scottish Secretary responds to Chancellor's Spring Statement

News story

Alister Jack welcomes measures to ease the rising cost of living, cut tax for lower earners and reduce fuel duty.



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