



Example Guidance & Process Insertions for the External Examining of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)



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** All weblinks and web-images checked and correct at time of writing (May 2026).*

About this Toolkit

The Toolkit provides a lens through which to scrutinise and adapt existing academic governance and quality management processes to create Level 4 and Level 5 programmes of study that are HTQ-ready. By HTQ-ready, we mean that qualifications are ready for submission to the Department for Education (DfE) for approval as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs), and to navigate this external approvals process as smoothly as possible.

Importantly, the Toolkit is not intended to replace or duplicate established quality management processes. However, in recognition of the unique positioning of HTQs as classroom-based, occupational-standard aligned and employer-endorsed qualifications, it is important that programmes are as fully prepared as possible before entering the DfE approval process.

The aim is to minimise the need for changes to programmes and modules that have already been validated, and to avoid unnecessary delays in the approval process. As a qualification cannot be marketed as an HTQ until full DfE approval has been granted, any such delays may have consequences for student recruitment and programme delivery.

The Toolkit was developed by Elizabeth Cleaver Consulting Limited in partnership with an expert practitioner group comprising representatives from De Montfort University, New College Durham, Newcastle College University Centre, Northumbria University, Nottingham Trent University, Sheffield Hallam University, Teesside University, the University of Manchester, the University of Portsmouth and the University of Salford.

The resources were developed in response to feedback from awarding organisations involved in the pre-2025 HTQ approval process, as highlighted in Gatsby's 2025 report, *The Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) Approval Process in England: A Review*.

The project was commissioned by the Gatsby Foundation and supported by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Users are advised to consult the most recent guidance from the DfE on the HTQ approval process before using these resources.

Purpose of this document

This guidance document has been developed as one of a suite of resources designed to support degree awarding bodies in England to prepare to submit validated Level 4 or 5 qualifications for external approval and recognition by the Department for Education (DfE) as Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).

It provides five suggested HTQ-relevant insertions for your institutional external examiner policy, processes and handbooks. Importantly, the insertions are not intended as a replacement for current guidance or templates but are designed to augment them, adding nuanced information that will support a positive and productive relationship between the awarding body and the appointed external examiner.

Each insertion is designed to ensure that the external examiner is recruited and prepared appropriately – and can ask questions and make judgements in relation to the particular requirements of HTQ approved awards. Together, they support awarding bodies to address the questions outlined in Section D2 of the overarching HTQ Readiness Prompts worksheet, and letters and numbers relate to the original section in which each question is situated.

C2. External Examining

- a. Do External Examiner recruitment processes require HTQ experience and/or knowledge and understanding of HTQ programme design?
- b. Does External Examiner guidance and training include HTQ-specific information?
- c. Do External Examiner forms include a section where HTQ alignment (or potential for alignment) - to occupational standards and employer needs - can be discussed and any issues highlighted?

Guidance Insert 1: The Recruitment of External Examiners for HTQs

This suggested insertion is provided to ensure that those responsible for academic programmes make appropriate recommendations for external examiners for HTQ programmes.

< Insert awarding body title or generic name e.g. The University, The University Centre > attaches great importance to peer review from External Examiners. It is a key mechanism for ensuring that:

- the academic and occupational standards of HTQ awards and their component parts are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the standards of HTQ student performance are properly judged against this.
- the assessment of HTQ programmes accurately and comprehensively measures student achievement against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the relevant Skills England approved Occupational Standard.
- < Insert awarding body title or generic name > can compare the standard of its HTQ awards with those of other awarding bodies.

As such, nominees will normally have experience and expertise in one or both of the following:

- Practice-based / vocational education in relation to other programmes that use occupational standards (e.g. HTQs or apprenticeships);
- Experience of occupational standards and assessment against these.

In addition, nominees will be expected to be academically competent in degree-level educational design and assessment.

Guidance Insert 2: General Statement on the Role of HTQ External Examiners

This suggested insertion is provided to ensure that all relevant staff at the awarding body and all appointed HTQ external examiners are fully briefed in regard to role requirements and responsibilities.

< Insert awarding body title or generic name > attaches great importance to peer review from External Examiners. It is a key mechanism for ensuring that:

- the academic and occupational standards of HTQ awards and their component parts are set and maintained at the appropriate level, and that the standards of HTQ student performance are properly judged against this.
- the assessment of HTQ programmes accurately and comprehensively measures student achievement against the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the relevant Skills England approved Occupational Standard.
- < Insert awarding body title or generic name > can compare the standard of its HTQ awards with those of other awarding bodies.
- The HTQ programme and its modules can evidence engagement with employer partners and the design and delivery of work-relevant learning and assessment opportunities.

The responsibilities of individual External Examiners therefore stem from this. All those appointed as an HTQ External Examiner must act as an independent and impartial advisor who provides informed comment on the academic and occupational standards set by an HTQ programme of study, and any student achievements in relation to these standards.

Guidance Insert 3: Induction, Training and Support for External Examiners for HTQs

This suggested insertion is provided to ensure the appropriate induction, training and support for HTQ external examiners.

Each <Insert responsible operational area of the institution e.g. school, department > will provide you with relevant information on the programme of study for which you are responsible, including information on any relevant modules and associated assessments. For any HTQ programmes this must include:

- detail of relevant occupational standard(s) to which the programme aligns;
- validation mapping documents that chart the relationship between modular learning outcomes and assessments and the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) contained in the occupational standard(s);
- any gaps in this mapping with a rationale (e.g. KSBs that were designed to reflect or use apprentices' workplace experiences, that cannot readily be assessed through simulation or other activities in a classroom-based programme).
- alignment to any particular employers and/or employment sectors.

<Insert role title of responsible person e.g. The Head of Department/School > holds overall responsibility for ensuring that you receive appropriate support and information to enable you to engage fully with your role as an HTQ External Examiner. In practice, responsibility for briefing and induction may be delegated, for example, to the <Insert role title of responsible delegatee e.g. Director of Studies or Course Leader >.

Guidance Insert 4: Undertaking your role as an HTQ External Examiner

This suggested insertion outlines the specific duties of an HTQ External Examiner. It particularly outlines duties in relation to the key Skills England requirements of occupational standards and their KSBs and employer engagement.

Your contribution as an External Examiner is vitally important for ensuring that HTQs meet Department for Education HTQ approval requirements: that they map to a registered occupational standard and can directly evidence employer alignment and engagement. < Insert awarding body title or generic name e.g. The University, The University Centre > therefore requires you to consider each piece of assessment that contributes the final award of the HTQ qualification in relation to:

- the relationship between module learning outcomes, occupational standard knowledge, skills and behaviours, and associated assessment marking criteria. You are particularly asked to comment upon the quality of assessment criteria as well as to review the appropriateness of examination questions and assessment briefs.
- evidence that an appropriate number of assessments either stem from direct employer engagement (e.g. live briefs) or simulate appropriate and up-to-date workplace tasks, priorities, roles and responsibilities.
- whether the academic and occupational standards as set out in the qualification are comparable, in your professional opinion, with those of any similar courses in your own institution or other institutions for which you are an External Examiner.

Where an HTQ course is delivered via several modes (e.g. part or full-time; in person or online etc.) and/or forms part of a larger delivery model with pathways leading to several different award outcomes, a focused assessment of each separate mode and/or pathway should be reflected in your report to the University. This may be done through the submission of separate reports, or by the clear labelling and differentiation of comments in a single report. < Insert responsible operational area of the institution e.g. The Quality Team, The Department > will advise on the appropriate method for the HTQ course to which you are appointed to.

It is important to note that your reports and comments – particularly those in relation to occupational standard alignment and employer-engagement - will along with evidence from annual monitoring processes, academic peer reviews, reports from professional bodies and/or employer and student feedback, form an evidence base for the periodic review of the HTQ programme. During the periodic review process, a panel will revisit the purpose, aims and intended learning outcomes of the programme, examine the quality of current provision and identify opportunities for ongoing improvement or change.

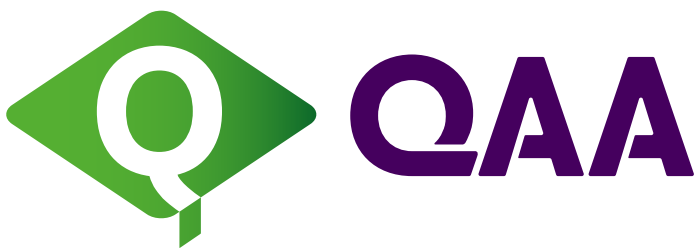
Guidance Insert 5: The External Examiners' Reporting Form

This suggested insertion provides wording that you may wish to use to adapt your external examiners' reporting form. This evidence once collected will be helpful to evidence the ongoing compliance of a programme and its modules, which will provide contributory evidence for the re-approval of your HTQ by DfE and/or an awarding body's periodic review.

Due to the ongoing requirement for all registered HTQs to align to occupational standards, and to evidence employer alignment and engagement, please comment directly on:

- the appropriateness of the HTQ programme's **academic and occupational standards**
- the appropriateness of the **learning and assessment approaches** of the programme in relation to meeting the knowledge, skills and behaviours set out in the occupational standard to which the HTQ is aligned.
- evidence of **employer/industry engagement** in the ongoing design and operation of learning and teaching and assessment tasks.

Please include as much information and detail as possible. This will help us to maintain and enhance the quality and standards of our HTQ programmes, and will contribute to the evidence base for any future revalidations.



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