



# A Guide to the Academic Governance of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs) in Degree Awarding Bodies in England



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## 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).

Its purpose is to provide information with which to reflect on current academic and institutional governance arrangements, to ensure that approved HTQs that become part of a portfolio of academic awards are subject to scrutiny at all levels of academic governance, including at the very highest decision making levels of the organisation.

While the academic governance of HTQs is not directly referenced in current DfE HTQ approvals processes, it is nevertheless an important consideration; not least due to the educational oversight requirement placed on degree awarding organisations' governing bodies by the Office for Students (see Appendix 1).

## Distinctively HTQ

It can be easy to assume that developments in academic governance relating to the introduction of degree apprenticeships (also aligned to Skills England occupational standards) will ensure awarding body readiness for the introduction of HTQs. However, there are a number of factors that differentiate HTQs and apprenticeships. When considering where and when the authoritative academic decisions should be made in relation to HTQs, the following points should therefore be noted:

1. HTQs are predominantly **classroom-based qualifications** and unless specified in certain 'licence to practice' workforce areas, they do not require the 'on the job' elements of training that are a requirement of apprenticeships .
2. **External HTQ approval is a single event.** This takes place following programme validation and grants a timebound period in which a qualification can be designated as an HTQ. No renewal (or ongoing external monitoring by the DfE) is required during this period unless significant changes are made to a relevant occupational standard and/or to a programme of study.
3. **Employer engagement** and evidence of demand for the qualification is required as part of the DfE HTQ approval process. However, there is no requirement for an ongoing apprenticeship-type 'tripartite' arrangement with employers during the delivery of the qualification. This notwithstanding, evidence of continuing employer engagement, endorsement and demand should be gathered and reported at relevant academic governance decision making points, to ensure that HTQs continue to meet this requirement throughout their lifecycle.
4. HTQ **occupational standard mapping should be explicitly recorded** as part of an awarding body's quality management processes and ready for external scrutiny by DfE prior to designation and delivery.
5. The **external quality assurance** of HTQ provision is undertaken by the OfS/Ofqual and does not involve Ofsted (currently a requirement of apprenticeship delivery).
6. HTQs are **financed** by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement or private/employer funding and cannot be funded through the Growth and Skills Levy. As such, there is no requirement to submit monthly Individualised Learner Record (ILR) returns to maintain funding eligibility (currently required of apprenticeship delivery).

## HTQ Governance Prompts

With these points in mind, a short set of HTQ governance prompts is provided to support you to consider current institutional academic governance arrangements and whether they are ready to accommodate HTQs as part of the institutional programme portfolio. The questions below are reproduced from the overarching HTQ Readiness Prompts worksheet, and letters and numbers relate to the original section in which each question is situated.

### A1. Academic Governance

- a. Are academic standards for HTQs clearly understood and owned by the overarching academic authority of the awarding body?
- b. Is delegated authority for HTQ-related academic decisions explicitly defined and documented?
- c. Do academic governance arrangements apply equally to HTQs delivered internally and with partners?
- d. Can academic governance arrangements demonstrate effective oversight of HTQs beyond initial approval?

### A2. Institutional Governance and Leadership

- a. Has the institution's governing body has been formally briefed on HTQs, including their purpose, their place in the regulatory landscape, and their relationship to existing qualifications?
- b. Does the governing body receive assurance that HTQs are subject to appropriate academic governance and oversight?
- c. Is there a named Executive sponsor who is accountable for:
  - HTQ strategy and offer?
  - HTQ performance and risk management?

## Academic governance in context

The Office for Students' (OfS) Guidance on the General Ongoing Conditions of Registration for English providers (condition E2)<sup>1</sup> set out that each registered educational provider's governing body must oversee the educational activities of the provider, in order to maintain public confidence in the **quality** of its educational provision (conditions B1-4) and the **standards** of its academic awards (condition B5). These requirements are underpinned by wider public interest governance principles (Annex B), which explicitly discuss the ways in which this educational oversight is to be managed (Principle IV):

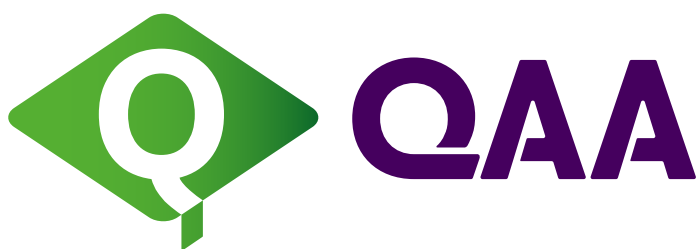
*IV. Academic governance: The governing body receives and tests assurance that academic governance is adequate and effective through explicit protocols with the senate/academic board (or equivalent).*

In practice this assurance stems from the regulatory frameworks, policies and codes of practice, protocols, roles, responsibilities, procedures and reporting that together underpin and scaffold the educational function of the higher awarding body.

These enable each provider's academic community to endorse the propriety of academic judgements across the student journey: from fitness to enter higher education, via evidence of continued good standing, to qualification to graduate with an institutional award. These endorsements, which travel up (and down) the institution from decision-making boards to deliberative committees, rest on common and shared (national) understandings of qualification and performance standards and how best to measure students work against these. They are founded on robust multi-level processes of peer review and scrutiny which record how these shared standards have been applied in varying contexts and how academic judgements have been made.

Designed originally to support the academic governance of quality and standards of bachelor's and master's degrees, these academic governance processes have necessarily adapted to meet recent changes in the sector and a broadening portfolio of educational awards.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/part-v-guidance-on-the-general-ongoing-conditions-of-registration/>



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