



Guide to Identifying Occupational Standards for 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 to the Department for Education (DfE) for approval and recognition as a Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ).

Its focus is on the **identification of appropriate occupational standards** to which existing or newly designed qualifications can be aligned, ready for approval and recognition.

HTQs and occupational standards

HTQ is a national designation that can be sought for selected Level 4 or 5 classroom based qualifications. To gain this award, a provider must, alongside other requirements, evidence that a qualification appropriately and thoroughly maps to the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) of a designated HTQ occupational standard.

In scope or out of scope?

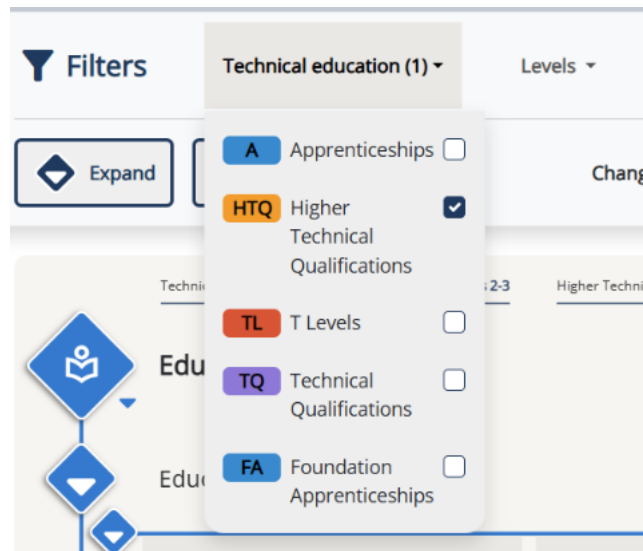
Not all occupational standards are currently in scope for all technical qualifications. To find HTQ eligible occupational standards, awarding bodies can visit the Skills England Occupational Map webpages where they are able to click on the tile links for any relevant subject/professional routes. Occupational maps highlight the 15 subject/professional areas in which occupational standards sit and any qualifications in this area from Levels 2 to Levels 7 of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications can be found.

Skills England's occupational maps show where technical education can lead

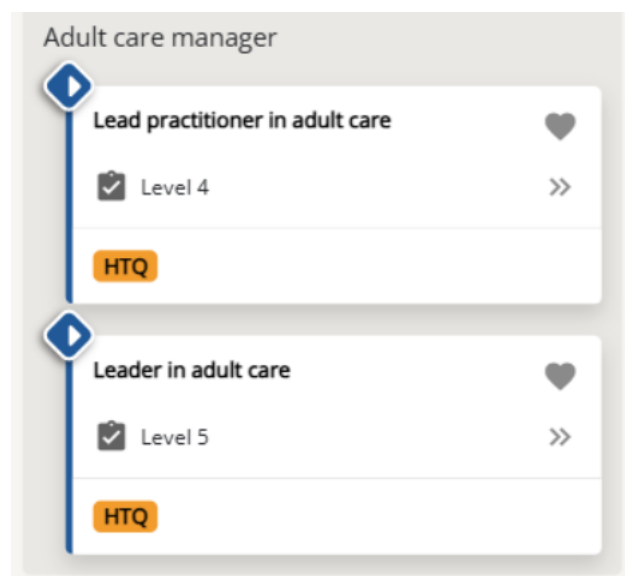
Explore Skills England's occupational maps by selecting a route below:



Once you have entered a particular occupational route map, it is possible to use a filter to identify any occupational standards that are currently licenced for HTQ delivery:



A small gold-coloured HTQ icon on each occupational standard tile is used to indicate eligibility. This aligns to the gold colouring of the quality mark that can be displayed once qualifications have been approved as designated HTQs. If an HTQ icon is not displayed, please contact Skills England to find out whether future alignment is planned and/or to indicate interest in the potential for HTQ approval associated with a current apprenticeship occupational standard.



HTQ Occupational Standard Prompts

A short set of prompts are provided to support you to identify appropriate occupational standards – at validation and periodic review quality management and staff development touchpoints. The occupational standard questions below are reproduced from the toolkit’s overarching HTQ Readiness Prompts worksheet, and letters and numbers relate to the original section in which each question is situated:

Development Consent Stage

B2. Alignment to Occupational Standard(s)

- a. Do programme development consent/planning processes and paperwork include the expectation for all programmes in relevant areas to identify relevant occupational standards - irrespective of whether the programme is planning to gain HTQ approval?
- b. Are programmes required to state why they are not considering HTQ approval?

Validation Stage

C2. Alignment to Occupational Standard(s)

- a. Do programme specification documents have required sections which ask for the identification of and alignment to relevant Occupational Standard(s)?
- b. Are programme development teams provided with support and guidance to identify programme-relevant occupational standards and associated HTQ opportunities?

Monitoring and Change

There may also be opportunities for programme teams to consider new or continued occupational standard alignment at points between validation and periodic review. This could be due to changes to the programme, the changing needs of employer partners, and/or the emergence of new or revised occupational standards. As such, a focus on the alignment of programmes to HTQ occupational standards should be part of an institution’s annual monitoring and programme change processes.

D1. Annual monitoring

- a. Do annual monitoring processes include HTQ specific questions and requirements around continued KSB alignment?
- b. Do annual monitoring processes for HTQ programmes ask for information from the Skills England occupational standards reapproval schedule that may impact on future programme changes?

D2. External Examining

- 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?

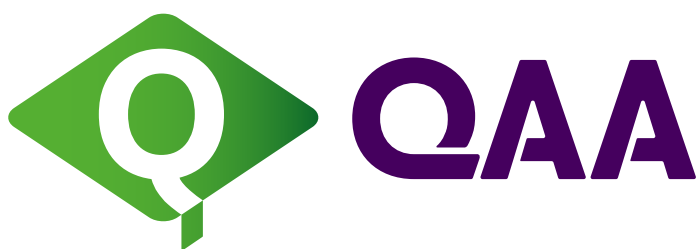
D3. Making programme and module changes

- d. Do Major/Minor change processes and paperwork require HTQ programmes, or any modules shared with HTQ programmes, to directly highlight the impact of any proposed changes on continued alignment to KSBs?

Periodic Review Stage

E2. Alignment to Occupational Standard(s)

- a. Do PR processes and paperwork include the expectation for non-HTQ programmes in relevant areas to identify potentially relevant occupational standards for the programme(s) under review?
- b. Are these programmes required to state why they are not considering HTQ approval as they revalidate?
- c. Do HTQ PR processes require HTQ programmes to evidence continuing alignment to relevant occupational standards?



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