



Introduction to the HTQ-readiness Toolkit

A resource to support the design,
validation and ongoing quality assurance
of Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs)



Elizabeth Cleaver Consulting Limited



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Introduction to HTQs

The term Higher Technical Qualification (HTQ) is a national designation applied to selected Level 4 and Level 5 classroom-based qualifications in England. The first cohorts of students began studying HTQs in September 2022.

HTQs sit at the centre of current government policy on technical education and skills development and are identified as a key delivery mechanism in the Post16 Education and Skills White Paper (2025) ¹. They form part of a wider suite of reformed technical qualifications, alongside T Levels and apprenticeships, all of which are required to align to employer-developed occupational standards. These standards set out the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) required for effective performance within a defined occupation.

It is important to note that an HTQ (despite its name) is not a qualification in its own right. The HTQ quality mark is awarded to already validated Level 4 or 5 qualifications. To gain this award, currently a provider must evidence the following on a qualification-by-qualification basis:

- evidence of employer engagement and demand;
- a thorough mapping to the KSBs of a relevant designated occupational standard;
- an assessment strategy or syllabus including content coverage, marking approach and standard setting and sample assessment materials.

Although HTQs do not normally require a work placement (unless specifically required, particularly in relation to healthcare fields), you may also wish to consider how this could be integrated for students who wish to engage directly with employers.

Further information about HTQs, the occupational standards in scope, and the current approvals process, can be found by visiting the relevant government webpages.²

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/post-16-education-and-skills-white-paper>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-technical-qualification-overview/higher-technical-qualification-an-introduction>

All weblinks 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. Users are advised to consult the most recent guidance from the DfE on the HTQ approval process before using these resources.

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.

HTQ Toolkit Contents

1. HTQ Quality Management Readiness Checklist

This resource sets out a series of questions mapped to key aspects of an awarding body's academic governance and quality management processes. It is designed to support providers in assessing a programme's readiness for DfE HTQ approval. The questions are intended to prompt structured reflection, an initial gap analysis, and the identification of any actions required.

It is designed not only to reflect the requirements of the DfE HTQ approvals process, but also to support the development of high quality HTQ- aligned institutional practices.

A short set of further resources provide guidance or exemplar text designed to augment policies, processes and/or guidance where the differences between HTQs and other qualifications are significant enough to warrant scrutiny and focus. These are outlined below and represented in overview in Figure1.

2. A Guide to the Academic Governance of HTQs in Degree Awarding Bodies in England

This resource supports reflection on an awarding body's academic and institutional governance arrangements, to ensure that approved HTQs included within the organisation's academic awards portfolio are subject to appropriate oversight and scrutiny at the highest levels of the organisation.

3. Guide to Identifying Occupational Standards for HTQs.

This resource supports the identification of appropriate occupational standards for existing or newly developed qualifications seeking external DfE HTQ approval.

4. Example Quality Assurance Process Insertions

This resource proposes eight HTQ-relevant enhancements for inclusion within institutional development consent, validation, and periodic review policies, processes, and handbooks. Together, these insertions are designed to ensure that appropriate panel composition, expertise, and practice are embedded throughout approval and review activity, thereby supporting the successful approval and ongoing delivery of HTQs.

5. Guide to Writing KSB-aligned Learning Outcomes

This resource supports the design of programme and module learning outcomes that are explicitly mapped to the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) set out in an HTQ-designated occupational standard.

6. Example Student Programme Handbook Insertions

This resource offers four HTQ-relevant enhancements for inclusion within student-facing Programme Handbook templates. These insertions are intended to complement, rather than replace, existing templates by adding targeted and nuanced information to support a positive and well-informed student experience on HTQ programmes.

7. Example External Examiner Guidance and Process Insertions

This resource offers five HTQ-relevant enhancements for inclusion within institutional external examiner policies, processes, and handbooks. These insertions are intended to complement existing documentation, rather than replace it, by providing additional guidance to support the effective oversight of HTQ programmes by external examiners.

Acknowledgements

The HTQ Readiness Toolkit was developed on behalf of the Gatsby Foundation and the Quality Assurance Agency by Professor Elizabeth Cleaver, in response to Recommendation 1 of the 2025 report *The Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) approval process in England: a Review*.

The Toolkit resources were developed in consultation with an expert practitioner group and subsequently reviewed by members of a QAA-convened expert Level 4 and 5 reference group, all drawn from the English tertiary sector. Special thanks to the following people who gave permission to be acknowledged.

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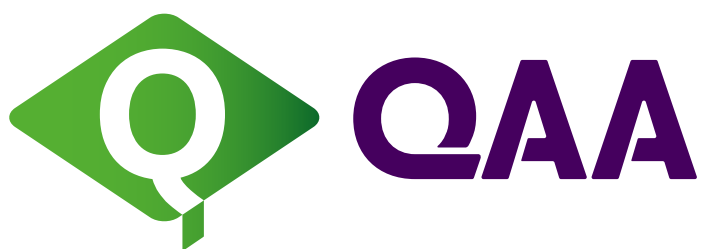
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