

Higher Technical Qualifications Knowledge Network: HTQs - why they matter

November 2023

Session details: Everybody seems to agree that higher technical education is a good thing, but not everybody is agreed on the reasons why. In this session Ginny Page ran through the key arguments and evidence, exploring what more needs to be done to make recent reforms work, and discussing whether it matters if HTQs serve multiple purposes. Notes from the meeting can be found [here](#).

About the speaker: Ginny Page is Director of Education Programmes at the Gatsby Foundation and has led Gatsby's work supporting higher education for the last 7 years, as part of the transformation of the technical education system in England. She has been working with the Department for Education on the introduction of Higher Technical Qualifications - including commissioning foundational research on the 'missing middle' of higher technical education in England - and advising the emerging national network of Institutes of Technology.

Notes from the session

- **Alignment with occupational standards** infer that HTQ learners have the same level of knowledge as apprentices. This may not be the case. In some occupations (e.g. construction) L4/5 can typically be people in work with a great deal of experience who are upskilling, in others they may be school and college leavers with little industry experience.
- **Embedded placements** - there are some occupations where a placement is a compulsory element of an HTQ, while others can remain classroom based with no requirement for any work placement or integration. Although the general expectation is 80% classroom delivery if there is no mandated placement and work integration is hard to achieve (the employer appetite / capacity to support placements depends upon the sector) it is difficult to see how this might be managed.
- **Occupational standard as a design feature** – the use of and alignment to the occupational standard has the potential to be variable depending on setting and optional content. Sheffield Hallam indicated they had very much been dissuaded from partial coverage by IfATE during the HTQ application process. However, learners only need to be able to show a threshold level of competence and, HTQs are not covering the same standard in the same ways across the board. Ideally each HTQ would have core compulsory features from a given occupational standard. This would allow for consistency, transferability, portability and flexibility. But how easy will it be to rein in the current differences in HTQs across providers?
- **The importance of regional skills ecosystems** – LSIPs, FE, IoTs and Freeports etc. In relation to the point above about differences, how far should we be slowing down and planning to tie in with wider regional developments rather than forging ahead in our own right? Not everyone should realistically offer everything – impracticable and unsustainable. What might that regional landscape look like? And who might best offer HTQs as part of this?

- **Changing recognition and awareness** - Professional bodies are starting to explicitly recognise HTQs in own registration and membership criteria. This needs to be shared with learners as it may help to improve the attractiveness of HTQs.
- **Links and overlaps** - IfATE have changed the criteria on mandated qualifications - HTQs can now be awarded within Apprenticeships. Nottingham Trent University is already doing this as part of their Engineering Manufacturing apprenticeship – in integrating apprenticeships and full time HTQ learners they have created a rich community of practice, and economies of scale.
- **Levy changes?** Although not currently agreed, discussions are underway to allow the Levy to be spent on employed individuals undertaking modular learning to upskill as part of their job.