

Recruiting to higher technical and HTQ courses

July 2024

Session details: In this session Ben Verinder offered advice and guidance on marketing best practice for HTQs, based on the literature and Chalkstream studies, as well as tips on how providers can develop their own market research capabilities to support higher technical and, specifically, HTQ success.

About the speaker: Ben is managing director of [Chalkstream](#), an agency specialising in reputation and policy research, primarily to the education sector. Ben is the former communications director of the Association of Colleges, a founding chartered public relations practitioner and advisor to senior teams and boards across the FE, HE and schools sectors on strategic planning issues, informed by research insight. Chalkstream has undertaken multiple studies into the Level 4+ landscape in the UK.

Notes from the session

It's a complex market: The literature is clear that recognition of L4 and 5 qualifications in the market is low - more likely to be recognised in terms of certification rather than qualifications. There is also often competition in this space between validating partners and colleges. Employer sponsorship of these qualifications is limited, and students have different motivations and starting points to more traditional 3-year degree students. And it is often difficult to get providers commitment to these qualifications – can be seen as mission bloat. And there is overlap – HTQs are often conversions rather than new qualifications – so there is not always a new market to tap. Finally, the lower the level the higher the desire for F2F provision.

Types of students are very varied too – so its difficult to develop a single marketing strategy. But there are some trends. The course comes first, then location, then reputation. The DfE [2022 - Higher Technical Learners survey](#) can help us to understand further why these students study and why they pick a particular the course. Their **motivators** are often related to job prospects and progression opportunities. Also convenience is key to the adult market - if you have convenient timetabling market it. Adults have real commitments and complex lives. There are no real single sets of **influencers** for this group. It is very age dependent - family member influence declines as students get older. Google or search engines are the most important source of information.

Three possible markets can be identified:

- Internal progression from L3 - Very clear correlation between conversations about progression and the level of feeling of informed about next steps. If you don't have the conversation, they are less likely to progress internally. This is highly influenced by L3 tutors which in some institutions can be a cultural and leadership challenge. See article. And if you are looking to influence external L3 students - trying to persuade students to move across institutions may

require the influence of these tutors too. But this is obviously a competitive challenge. If possible, outreach efforts can be best employed here.

- Employer supported – but here students often have no real choice about where and what they study. This not only has challenges for recruitment but also ongoing motivations to study. Employer relationships are clearly very important here. But they are very busy so you need to find ways to reach them that are the most efficient for them
- External progression from L3 - masterclasses within school environment delivered by L4/5 tutors is one of the more effective ways

Question 1: Do you have any advice about outreach activity to reach adults not in employment, for example, to engage them back with higher education

Tends to be most effective where you have strong relationships with community partners – and a broader set of stakeholder relationships. A programme of outreach and partnership with community groups and charities is key here. One college that does this well has a leadership post for this work. This requires corpal communication and a CRM - siloed partnership and relationship development won't work as this can create overkill or gaps when someone leaves or taken onto another role.

Question 2: IfATE HTQ application has been a very problematic process - seems to want to map local skills need to nationally verified skills (occupational standards). Is there a way - given the market is predominantly 25+, to make the learning attractive to them. It's a bit commitment in terms of time and money.

This is really variable - course and subject dependent. A childcare (mainly female) student will prefer day release – they are often provided with a day off to complete this. In contrast engineering and construction tend to be male PT and seem to prefer variable afternoon provision. It is very course/gender and provision dependent. The DfE Higher Technical Learners study has information on this.

Question 3: Based on conversations with college HE staff and careers advisers and information currently publicly available [London Higher](#) are starting to put together resources for students and advisers on HTQs / L4 &5. Could you say a bit more about key reasons why level 3 learners don't consider this option?

The main reason is the majority are looking for degrees (c. 80%). That still leaves 1000s of potential students. If they are then split into work/apprenticeships/progression to other technical education, it's a smaller number. Decisions are often around convenience (with work or other commitments). Also as mentioned, they may have been put off by level 3 tutors/experience. But there is a big group undecided and our experience and evidence show that having a chat can really make a difference to their choices. There is a correlation between this and progression onto courses. Just before election the DfE was going to update resources for providers targeting at L3 tutors. May be released now?