

HTQ Policy and Admissions - 30 January 2025

Session details: In this session Pete Myant from DfE presented a policy update on HTQs and highlighted some of the new DfE resources that are available to support HTQ providers. We were also joined by Philippa Alway who provided an overview of the support and resources available from UCAS through information, advice and guidance and admissions for HTQs and discussed a new report from UCAS/the Gatsby Charitable Foundation. [Where Next? Who applies for Level 4 and 5 qualifications?](#)

About the speakers:

- **Pete Myant** leads higher technical education (HTE) strategy and growth within the Department for Education. He oversees work to improve the profile, prestige and uptake of HTE in England, including the overall strategy for how it helps growth and opportunity, and helping to raise awareness and understanding of HTE amongst learners and employers through the Skills for Life communications campaign and improvements to information, advice and guidance.
- **Philippa Alway** leads the skills, schools and colleges work in UCAS's policy team. She works with stakeholders and colleagues to navigate what the policy landscape means for UCAS and its work connecting people to their next step in education and skills. Prior to this, she managed campaigns and projects for the Association of Colleges (e.g. the future of tertiary education, sustainability and unemployment).

Notes from the session

HTQ course numbers are growing but they can still appear elusive: a further 93 qualifications have been approved as HTQs for teaching from this September, taking it to over 263 approved HTQs across 13 occupational routes. There are currently 417 HTQs listed on UCAS for Sept 2025 starts. Despite this it can still be difficult to understand HTQs and locate suitable courses to go on. The DfE want to progress work over the coming months to improve the positioning of HTQs in mainstream awareness. They will work with providers and stakeholders as the Post-16 Skills and Education strategy develops, clarifying the role that HTQs play in supporting the government's growth and opportunity missions. Pete will keep the group updated on how you can contribute to this.

Information Advice and Guidance: to support this a range of new materials have been developed. The Skills for Life campaign continues in its roll out – and directs prospective students to the Skills for Careers website and then the UCAS website. DfE has been working with careers professionals (Careers Enterprise Company and Careers Development Institute) to create a better understanding of HTQs and improve their promotion. They have designed support materials for use in schools including a short introductory HTQ video, teacher information packs and lesson plans, a parents’ briefing and leaflet and a letter from an HTQ student explaining the benefits they gained from the course. Employer leaflets and employer case study videos have also been produced. The DfE supported ASK Programme has additionally created new support materials for schools and colleges and are running information webinars for parents, and career leads.

However, although all funded by DfE, these resources are located in different places. Therefore, Gatsby is hosting a new HTQ website that will curate and link to all of this content as a one stop shop. This is due for launch shortly.

UCAS and HTQs: UCAS now has a provider-facing collection tool for course listings and within that there is a flag to tick which ensures applicants can identify HTQs in course search and apply tools. A written guide and UCAS subject matter experts, support providers to list HTQs appropriately. The ultimate aim is to ensure that applicants are able to find HTQs using a course search filter. Extra HTQ-specific information pops up on HTQ pages to explain the kitemark cog. DfE have run several e-mail campaigns for prospective applicants via UCAS to raise awareness of HTQs as they make their application decisions.

UCAS uses data to inform all of its developments – but the research presented today is the first time a deep dive into Levels 4 and 5 has been undertaken specifically. To note - HTQs are part of this data-set, but given the proportionately small numbers of HTQ applicants, and the significantly greater number of non-HTQ courses in the Level 4 and 5 space, the research focuses on Level 4 and 5 qualifications more broadly.

Applicant numbers: Overall the number of applicants at Levels 4/5 have been decreasing - even between 2019 and 2023 the numbers have reduced by c.5k (down from 46k). Some subject areas (e.g. subjects allied to medicine) are bucking the trend while others are declining. And while the majority of Level 4 and 5 applicants also apply for Level 6 (mixed level applications), around a third choose the lower levels over Level 6 when offered.

Who are the learners?

- Applications for Level 4/5 are higher in areas where there are lower overall levels of participation (at Level 6) in higher education. In these areas HTQs and other

qualifications form an important part of the progression to higher education picture in these lower participation areas.

- Mature learners and those with regional ties and commitments are more likely than school leavers to take Levels 4 and 5.
- Care experienced learners, those experiencing some form of disability, and/or first generation higher education entrants are also found in greater proportions in this group of learners.

Those who have taken VTQs (e.g. BTEC) and have taken further education in an FE college environment are also more likely to apply for Levels 4 and 5.

The decision making process: Based on those who entered Level 4 and 5 in September 2024, entrants appear more likely to become aware of Level 4 and 5 as an option late in the applications process – leading to them making decisions quickly. Level 4 and 5 direct applicants are also more likely to be considering other options (apprenticeships and work) than those applying for entry at Level 6. Where people are actively applying for apprenticeships, alongside Level 4 and 5 courses, but this is not successful, their preferred next step is a Level 4/5 education course.

Respondents also noted the wish for greater application support including clearer explanations of different types of qualifications and more support for finance applications including how eligibility for fees and maintenance aligns to existing mortgage commitments and benefit payments. Survey respondents also stated they wanted to understand any work experience available as part of Level 4 or 5 courses.

UCAS colleagues are keen to help with understanding options and are building on existing content to ensure they can be shared in a more focused way at discovery events and through the UCAS website. They plan to include content on Level 4 and 5 courses in training for teachers and advisers - ensuring that Level 4 and 5 qualifications (including HTQs) are being presented alongside degrees and apprenticeships as potential future options for students.

Discussion points

- The importance of not just improving awareness of Level 4 and 5 study options, but incentivising this route into higher education.
- The importance of employers being at the heart of this incentivisation process.
- The importance of joined up government and skills policy – driven through the Post 16 skills and education strategy.
- The importance of UVAC and its members being able to contribute to the development of the Post 16 skills and education strategy.
- The importance of UVAC working on behalf of members to lobby for and support seamless progressions into and out of Level 4 and 5 courses, helping to remove

some of the barriers to delivering stackable higher technical education (e.g. retention and progression metrics).

- How can we engage more universities in offering HTQs and how can we use HTQs to simplify the crowded and confusing Level 4/5 market.
- Evolution and embedding of new qualifications takes time. Need to be patient, but there needs to be ongoing support for HTQs if they are to take their place in the qualifications landscape.
- Feedback on further developing course search and content on UCAS to make findings courses easier.
- Exploration of how people will find and search for modules for HTQs as the LLE rolls out.