

## Marketing HTQs – what we did and what we learned

4-minute read



### Key contacts

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**Connor Herron** is Head of Newcastle College University Centre which is part of the NCG group. The University Centre is the largest provider of college-based Higher Education in the UK, with over 2,000 degree-level students.

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### Overview

In this case study Maria and Connor discuss the range of ways in which they and their colleagues at Newcastle College University Centre have promoted and marketed their suite of HTQs—with ten already approved and three currently awaiting approval. They chart their marketing journey – what works and what less so – to offer us insights and lessons learned along the way.

### BAU (but with a kitemark)

At the time of putting this case study together we had, for the first time ever, heard an advert for HTQs on national radio. It was, if we are honest, a bit of a shock as up until now all advertising of

our HTQ courses has been led by our in-house marketing team and further promoted through our engagement with local employers, schools and colleges.

As we launched into our initial HTQ marketing work in 2022 we started to identify some of the barriers that we are sure many of you will identify from your own settings: it was difficult to assess who the target market was, how best to market to them and what to say. This last point was particularly significant given that the majority of our HTQ courses were running anyway (as foundation degrees). The tangible difference for those who hadn't been engaged in the IfATE approvals process, was the addition of the new kitemark. Our key messaging of course was more than this—that these are courses-plus, aligned to knowledge, skills and behaviours that have been identified as important by employers to ensure that courses are employer endorsed and industry-ready.

We've learned a lot on our marketing journey and have adapted our approach as we've created new products and identified new markets— all in the context of what remains a generally low HTQ knowledge-base amongst employers and prospective students.

## Broadcast media

Helped by a welcome and healthy allocation of SIF 1 and 2 funding, we were able to use local radio and social media and billboard advertising campaigns (see the image at the start of this case study) to broadcast our messages. With some of this funding we also created a short 1 minute video for social media: what an HTQ is and what you can study.

Every time a new HTQ gains approval, we treat it as a major event, publishing a press release to highlight the benefits of gaining the kitemark. Examples can be found by following the links below:

[Duo of HTQs at Newcastle College University Centre to Boost Local Health and Sport Sectors](#)

[Newcastle College University Centre \(NCUC\) Live Performance Technical Production Degree Set to Receive HTQ Status](#)

Right now we also have a social media campaign that focuses on 3 to 4 of our live HTQ courses. Our focus is rolling, and we pick different ones to run with every month. And we are excited that one of our cyber security students was chosen to become a 2-page case study feature in the February 2025 issues of Choices Magazine— [HTQs: Lucy's Story](#).

## Engaging with employers

Our faculty-led employer advisory boards have also been vitally important. This was perhaps the easiest and the hardest sell all at the same time.

We pride ourselves on the employment-oriented nature of our higher education provision, so trying to identify the difference that the HTQ kitemark would make to employers was our key priority. Ultimately, we found that the best way to promote the qualifications with the new kitemark was to talk about added-value. We discuss and promote them as Government-backed and endorsed versions of what we already do well: foundation degrees developed in

conjunction with industry and aligned to employers' needs that prepare students for their future careers.

## Building student and college staff knowledge

Our students are often our best advocates, and many of you will be familiar with the use student talking heads to endorse provision and facilities. We adopted this proven approach for our HTQs, asking students to talk to use about what they liked about their courses. But if we are honest, we have had to explain to a number of them that they are on an HTQ and we wanted them to mention this – many had arrived ready to talk about their great foundation degree courses, but not necessarily about HTQs.

Given this continuing low awareness of the HTQ brand, even for those on the kitemarked courses, we are planning to promote and showcase the HTQ brand and our fantastic HTQ spaces, resources and courses to all our current students using the promotional/video space on our student-facing app (MyDay).

Our colleagues also have a significant part to play. As we have worked alongside our wider college staff members, we found that a number of our departmental colleagues lacked confidence in articulating what HTQs are. We've now prepared a crib sheet and prompts and guidance to use across all our employer advisory boards, with our students and at open days etc. to make sure all the right topics are discussed and a consistent message is getting out there.

## Lessons learned

What would we advise another institution embarking on their own HTQ journey?

- **Get everyone talking.** Make sure everyone in your institution who needs to, understands and knows the key benefits of the HTQ brand. Until a national marketing campaign appears, and/or HTQs become a much more embedded part of the qualifications landscape, institutional staff and students (and their consistent and knowledgeable narratives) are really important for spreading the word to employers, schools, parents/carers and students.
- **Know your target markets.** It's easy to say the wrong thing or use the wrong marketing platform or promoting the wrong element of the qualification (e.g. resources, knowledge, skills, destinations) if you aren't keeping an eye on the pipeline of students coming in or the kinds of employees local employers are seeking.
- **Keep the qualification in sight.** As a nation we are very qualification-focused. Students and employers are likely to continue to value and talk about the qualification underpinning the HTQ kitemark irrespective of their HTQ knowledge or understanding. Any marketing, from official campaigns to open-days, outreach activities and employer events, needs to identify and promote both together.