

Working together to achieve HTQ status for University partner awards

4-minute read



Key contact

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Overview

Drawing on experience of working with partner colleges to build a collaborative team approach to HTQ applications, this case study showcases how fostering and sharing team insight and knowledge through a project-based approach has led to positive outcomes. The HTQ applications process has been led by the University of Central Lancashireⁱ (UCLAN) UK Partnerships Team with representation from academic delivery teams and quality assurance colleagues from within the University and partner colleges.

Early experiences and lessons learned

Our submission of qualifications for HTQ approval during some of the early approval cycles resulted in several queries and requests from IfATE for additional information before approval could be granted. This created a submission process that was much more iterative and lengthier than we had imagined. Further, given the complexities of HTQs as an award—involving both internal quality and external IfATE approvals processes—we were keen to reduce the burden for everyone concerned. By sharing

‘lessons learned’ with our university colleagues and partnership network we have been able to create efficiencies, improve the quality of submissions and reduce or remove IfATE requests for additional information.

Building a project approach and team

Due to the fact that we expected the number of HTQs offered by our partner colleagues to grow over time, we built our institutional HTQ application process using a number of key project management principles. At the heart of this approach is the importance of clear expectations: to support our partners’ timely return of evidence to us, and the review and return of these materials to partners with feedback before we create a final submission to IfATE. To do this we have:

- created a bite-sized, incremental approach with clear deadlines to support partner colleagues to complete each element in the given timeframe;
- factored in review time for our University quality team ahead of any materials being sent to IfATE;
- ensured support throughout, including best practice hints and tips as well as open communication to deal with any queries;
- created a university-led hands-on KSB mapping workshop, to support this extensive part of the application.

Each HTQ application is treated as a unique project, with an associated timeline including clear evidence return deadlines. After an initial briefing with the partner on matters such as the process and expectations, we work collaboratively on the application paperwork and ensure quality checks against IfATE minimum requirements and HTQ guidance are completed on an ongoing basis. Our aim is to minimise cliff-edge deadlines and misunderstanding about expectations.

Working together on quality submissions

Part of our offer to partners includes HTQ KSB workshops to share IfATE’s hints and tips that have been compiled during the last few cycles. From experience garnered in Cycle 3, I developed a guidance document of KSB mapping key facts. This ensured any partners new to the process (more often the case than not) were aware of IfATE common themes—for example, how to structure KSB evidence and how to incorporate wording from KSBs directly into the application. However, from Cycle 5 onwards we have additionally begun to offer this guidance as a collaborative workshop. This allows partners to work through examples, learn how to structure their submission evidence and discuss how different modules are aligning to common skills (for example, communication skills) that can be found across multiple occupational standards. Our experience shows that this workshop has not only increased the quality of the applications we submit but has also (our partners tell us) made the whole process more user friendly.

Embedding efficiencies and understanding

To ensure the success of our approach it has been imperative that we involve the University's Academic Quality Unit and internal academic colleagues from the very start of each application. This has enabled us to embed IfATE requirements into the University's processes wherever useful and possible, and to create efficiencies and reduce potential conflicts that may result from IfATE and University quality processes running in parallel. We are therefore up to speed with any module or course changes and reviews that are in process or planned, which could impact on any of our submissions to IfATE.

Taking this project and team-based approach has had the added benefit of enhancing understanding of HTQs and application requirements to internal and external colleagues across both academic and professional service teams.

Driving future success

We plan to continue to build our project and team-based approach to HTQ applications. In particular, we plan to ensure that KSB mapping workshops are offered both to teams and individuals who have not been involved in previous applications, as well as those who want to refresh their memories and continue to build on the benefits of team discussions and working.

We are also continuing to work closely with colleagues in our Academic Quality Unit to ensure that HTQ requirements continue to embed seamlessly within existing institutional quality processes and are considered during quality process reviews or as new processes are developed.

The process of applying for the HTQ quality mark can seem overwhelming and complicated to colleagues who are new to the IfATE approvals process. I would therefore encourage anyone supporting or undertaking HTQ applications to follow a project-based approach with clear timelines and expectations. Taking this approach at University of Central Lancashire has certainly ensured that we, in partnership with our partners, have been able to submit high standard applications for approval, that require minimal, or no further evidence requests from IfATE.

ⁱ The University will transition to using the new name University of Lancashire during 2025.