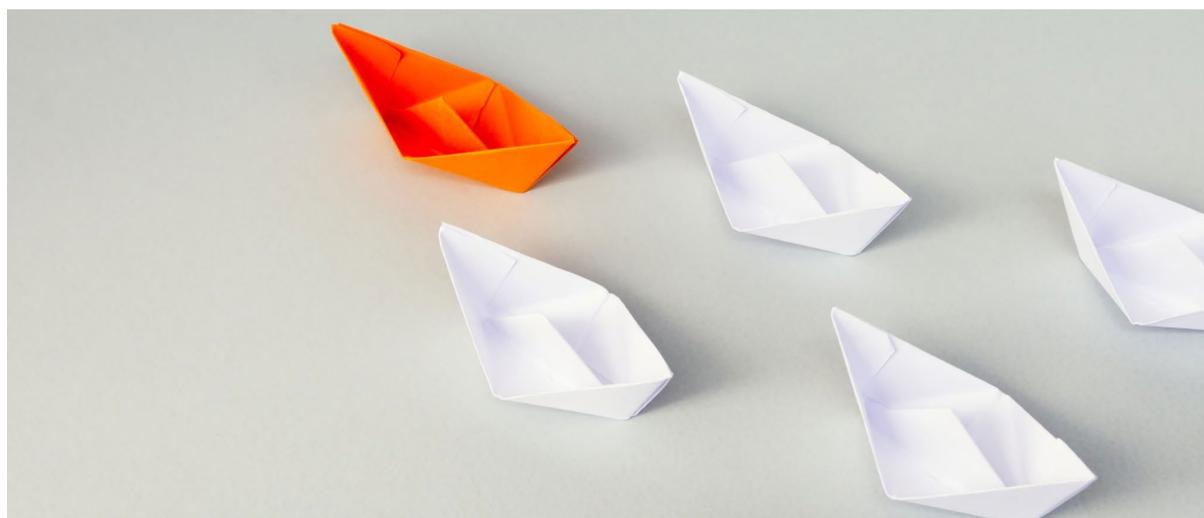


Thinking differently about HTQ learning outcomes & assessment

3-minute read



Key contact

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Overview

In this case study Helen Fogg tell us about Blackpool and The Fylde College’s higher technical education learning journey—from degree and higher apprenticeships to higher technical qualifications—and the lessons learned for institutional course design practices.

Formalising employability

Our journey into Higher Technical Education (HTE) has paralleled and arguably expedited the transformation of our higher education course design processes. Ever since we began working on the design and mapping of degree and higher apprenticeships, we have engaged in mapping the required design elements of our courses (i.e. module learning outcomes and assessments) to the knowledge, skills and behaviours (KSBs) of relevant occupational standards. You could say we’ve become extremely fond of these mapping spreadsheets!

Of course this wasn’t really new to us. As a regional and vocational college we’ve always worked to co-create curriculum with local employers and embedded vocational practices in our

courses. It's what we do. Nonetheless, the advent of apprenticeships and HTQs certainly impacted on our design practices, not least by creating a set of nationally endorsed KSBs to influence and drive the design of our courses.

IfATE-ready: the HTQ 'shift'

The advent of HTQs heralded the development of an enhanced form of KSB mapping within the college. The expectation of explicit alignment to occupational standards, beyond the 'internal' mapping activity that we were undertaking as part of our course validation processes, led to a shift in practice.

So that we were ready to complete the detailed IfATE (post-course approval) mapping spreadsheet we actively embedded KSB mapping within our internal course approvals processes to ensure we were IfATE-ready.

It's probably not surprising that this journey hasn't been completely straightforward. Occupational Standards can include KSBs that are more detailed (often multi-layered or faceted) and more numerous than the learning outcomes that would normally make up a programme and its modules. They may need re-interpretation to ensure they are relevant for classroom activities and are appropriate for different (scaffolded) levels of learning. This has meant that many of our colleagues have also been on a learning journey—thinking about how the new HTQs differ from the apprenticeships and traditional degree courses they have previously taught, and how skills and behaviours that previously were tested in the workplace can be evidenced through simulated activities and settings.

A varied future-proofed assessment diet

With this in mind, we have also been rethinking our approach to assessment to ensure that the KSBs associated with our courses can be fully evidenced. Due to the classroom based nature of HTQs many of our assessments now involve simulation—of real work-related tasks and activities that showcase our students have met the KSBs/learning outcomes of their course. Role play, practical tests, case studies and targeted reports (for example) are now much more commonly used. Even our longer assessments (traditionally an end of project report or dissertation) have become less focused on word length and traditional academic writing conventions, and more focused on meeting the needs of the 'industry audience' for which they are written. We are also considering the greater use of professional discussions—an assessment type that we already use within apprenticeship end-point assessments.

This shift has also helped us to address recent concerns that have arisen about the (ab)use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) in education. Once you start to create more contextualized assessments, using localised case studies, simulated activities and live briefs, then authentic first-hand experience matters more, and it's less likely that this can be convincingly reproduced by Gen AI.

Lessons learned

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

First, think about assessment at the earliest possible point in your HTQ journey, ideally at the very start of the validation and approvals process. This helps to avoid unnecessary engagement with what can turn out to be multi-stage amendment processes further down the line.

Secondly, make KSB mapping an essential and integrated part of your internal validation processes. This ensures that the very activity of writing your learning outcomes and designing your assessments is fully integrated with relevant KSBs from the start.

And finally, we are sure many who have been through the process will agree that engaging with the IfATE approvals team has been invaluable – for advice, guidance and also to provide feedback as the approval readies for submission. So don't hold back on getting in touch.