Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA)

A quick guide, value proposition and some frequently asked questions.

This document has been produced by the Engineering Council AAQA Implementation Working Group (AAQA Imp WG) which was established to support the implementation of the AAQA Standard.

What is meant by approval and accreditation?

- Fundamentally, this about the application of processes which judge the extent to which a qualification or apprenticeship delivers the **learning outcomes and/or competences** required for a particular level of professional registration.

- The precise definitions of approval and accreditation **(recognition)** are defined in the Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA) and for the most part, both have the same meaning other than:

    ○ **Approval** refers to a qualification or apprenticeship which is offered on a national (or international) basis and assessed by a regulated awarding organisation. ○ **Accreditation** relates to a programme delivered by a specific provider, often at a single location and which is awarded on a local rather than national (or international) basis.

What is meant by qualifications and apprenticeships?

- The Engineering Education and Skills sector is diverse although the AAQA Standard is designed to cover the wider range of programmes offered. These include:

- **Qualifications** such as National and Higher National Certificates and Diplomas, T-Level Qualifications, Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs). These may be college or training provider based or delivered on-the job.
- **Bachelors degrees** and **masters degrees** in engineering subjects. These may be centre based or delivered through partnership with employers making them work based.
- **Apprenticeships** at all levels. Typically, these will include a range of on-the-job training combined with off-the-job training at a college, training provider, or in the case of degree level apprenticeships in partnership with a university.
- **In-company** training programmes which lead to the development of learning outcomes and/or competences.

Who benefits from approved or accredited qualification and apprenticeships?

- There are a number of **stakeholders** who could benefit from using an approved or accredited qualification or apprenticeship. These include:

  - **Students, graduates, apprentices** and those people selecting a programme or on-programme will be assured that their chosen route has been subject to a process which attests its content and quality and confirms that it will lead to professional registration with all the career benefits associated with that. As such it is a quality mark.
  - **Employers** will be assured that an employee, (current or future), following or holding a recognised qualification or apprenticeship is at a standard associated with that required for professional registration as an engineer. It is an indicator that the content and quality is good and that they can trust its validity.
  - **Individuals** and their **employers** may find professional registration brings competitive advantage. Holding a recognising qualification or apprenticeship helps individuals on the journey towards registration.
  - Those who design the learning outcomes and competency content, and assessment of qualifications and apprenticeships (**awarding organisations, government agencies, representatives of industry**) can demonstrate that their product has been designed to meet professional standards and to demonstrate high quality.
  - **Colleges, training Providers and universities,** through their engagement in recognition processes and by offering recognised qualifications and apprenticeships , will demonstrate that they are committed to offering their

own stakeholders programmes which have been designed to meet professional standards and to demonstrate high quality.

- **Professional engineering institutions** will demonstrate to their community (employers, registrants, universities and training providers) that they are committed to supporting high quality qualifications and apprenticeships. In turn this could have a positive benefit through increased membership and more registrants, and an easier registration process.

Who is responsible for carrying out approval and accreditation?

- The Engineering Council (EngC) awards licences to Professional Engineering institutions (PEIs) to conduct approval and accreditation of qualifications and apprenticeships against the Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA) Standard.
- Not all PEIs have the necessary Engineering Council licence to use the AAQA Standard.
- The PEI will have various procedures and system to conduct the AAQA process.
- Those PEIs associated with particular industry sectors are mostly likely to approve or accredit qualifications and apprenticeships within their area of expertise.

How do I get my qualification or apprenticeship approved or accredited?

- During the planning and design of a qualification or apprenticeship you need to use the AAQA Standard and associated documentation detailing learning outcomes and competences to build in scope for approval or accreditation.
- Take advice from a PEI about the process.
- If you are a provider of a nationally (or internationally) awarded qualification or apprenticeship speak to the awarding organisation about seeking PEI approval so that the programme can be recognised in all delivery locations.

PLEASE NOTE – Recognition means different things to different stakeholders

- Engagement with a PEI in the design and/or mapping of a qualification or apprenticeship, or recognition by another regulator (such as the government agency, awarding organisation or industry sector) does not equate to recognition by

the engineering profession against Engineering Council standards unless a full approval or accreditation exercise against AAQA (or in the case of degree Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes, AHEP) has been completed and the programme is listed on the Engineering Council's course search database.

What does approval and accreditation by a PEI involve?

- The PEI may decide to get involved at the design stage with a view to ensuring that the relevant learning outcomes and/or competencies are included in the qualification or apprenticeship. This early-stage involvement does not ensure approval or accreditation and there will need to be a separate process to do this.
- The learning outcomes and/or competences delivered by the qualification or apprenticeship will need to be mapped. This mapping should be undertaken by those organisations responsible for the qualification or apprenticeship and may involve the PEI if that is deemed appropriate.
- It is normal practice that the awarding organisation or provider will submit a formal request for approval or accreditation. This may be because of routine PEI engagement with these organisations where approval and accreditation are being promoted.
- The PEI will analyse the qualification or apprenticeship map and judge the extent to which its content covers the necessary knowledge and skills learning outcomes and develops the competencies associated with a particular grade of professional registration.
- The PEI will review the assessment, resources, quality assurance and wider delivery processes to ensure these are at the required level and are reliable.
- All this information will be used by the PEI, following the principle of **peer review by professional engineers** to agree the extent to which the qualification or apprenticeship meets the standard. This is generally for a five-year period.
- Where approval or accreditation is awarded, the details will be added to the Engineering Council's database of approved and accredited qualification so that future users of the qualification are assured by its quality.
- The process can be conducted by an individual PEI or a number of PEIs working collaboratively.

Why are not all qualifications and apprenticeships approved or accredited?

- Approval and accreditation are a voluntary activity so it may be that the awarding organisation or provider has not yet sought this recognition.

- Newly developed qualification and apprenticeships may be awaiting approval or accreditation.
- The approval or accreditation process might have concluded that the qualification or apprenticeship does not have sufficient learning and skills or competence development, or that the quality standards do not meet the requirements of the AAQA or AHEP Standard .

(It should be noted that non-UK qualifications may be recognised by an agency in the jurisdiction in which they are delivered and in some cases this will afford recognition via International Accords. For more information visit www.engc.org.uk/international)

How do you differentiate between AAQA and AHEP

To answer this question, the development of AAQA and AHEP needs to be understood.

Accreditation of Higher Education Programmes (AHEP)

- AHEP has existed for many years and the current version is the fourth edition. As such, AHEP is widely used and very well understood.
- The key word here is **Accreditation**. The accreditation of education programmes, by recognised professional and statutory bodies, is a mark of assurance that the programmes meet the standards set by the relevant profession.
- It is normal that these education programmes will be provided and regulated by **Higher Education Institutions** (HEIs).
- The process of accreditation seeks to ensure that qualifications meet the **knowledge and understanding** requirements for Incorporated Engineer and Chartered Engineer. These qualifications include: ○ Foundation degrees, ○ Bachelors degrees, ○ Bachelors degrees with honours,
    - ○ Masters degrees including the Integrated Masters, and
    - ○ Doctoral degrees.
- It is important to note that the focus of AHEP is concerned with the knowledge and understanding content (and associated quality systems and resources) of programmes at Levels 5, 6 and 7. **It does not look at the assessment of competence for professional registration.**

Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA)

- AAQA is a new standard and by comparison to AHEP and was designed to have a much broader focus that AHEP. The current version is the first edition.
- AAQA replaced an earlier Approval of Qualifications and Apprenticeships Handbook (AQAH) and has a much wider scope than its predecessor reflecting the changing environment of the engineering education and skills sector. Please ensure you are using AAQA and not AQAH.
- The breadth of provision and levels covered by AAQA is much wider than with AHEP. This provision includes the following programmes:
  - Apprenticeships from Level 3 to Level 7.
  - Vocational programmes at Level 3 such as Diplomas and T levels.
  - Level 4 qualifications such as HNCs, HNDs and Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQs).
  - Employer led, in-house delivered qualifications and programmes.
- AHEP is concerned with ensuring that **the knowledge and learning content of these programmes and where appropriate, the competence development element meets the requirements** of Engineering Technician, Incorporated Engineer and Chartered Engineer. As such, AAQA has a much broader focus.
- Therefore, AAQA should be considered as a more inclusive standard which is designed to approve or accredit programmes which **include both knowledge and learning together with competence development**. Where appropriate AAQA will draw on the application of AHEP as part of the approval or accreditation process.

The simple answer is that AHEP and AAQA are differentiated by the nature of the programme being approved or accredited.

- If the programme is a bachelor or masters degree being delivered at a HEI, then AHEP is the mostly likely standard to be used.
- If the programme is an apprenticeship or a vocational programme and includes a combination of on-job and off-job training and competence development, then the broader focus of AAQA is most appropriate.

It should be noted that not all PEIs have an Engineering Council license to undertake approval or accreditation. Refer to the Pocket Guide to Professional Registration www.engc.org.uk/pinkbook for info about the PEIs and what recognition activity they are licensed to conduct.

How can we raise awareness for graduates around accreditation

See also the earlier question:

“Who benefits from approved or accredited qualification and apprenticeships?”

This is a marketing challenge and where it works well, will include the following:

- PEIs will engage with universities, colleges and training providers to explain the benefits of offering programmes which have been through the approval/accreditation process. The benefits will be evident and these partners will be keen to participate.
- PEIs, through their own staff, and volunteers such as professionally registered engineers will meet with students, undergraduates and post graduates to highlight the benefits of professional registration and the employment advancement it will offer.
- Universities, colleges and training providers will engage in the accreditation and/or approval process and celebrate the associated quality of their programmes as part
  of their marketing initiatives. They will make it clear to applicants that the programme meets the high standards set by the engineering community.
- PEIs will celebrate the achievements of their registrants and show case the opportunities on offer for those who are professionally registered on account of them following a recognised programme.
- The Engineering Council will continue to celebrate the achievements of registered professionals through wider marketing activities.
- Universities, college, training providers and PEIs will engage with employers to help raise awareness of professional registration and the benefits it brings to all stakeholders.
- The Engineering Council, through its association with the Royal Academy of Engineering and Engineering UK will continue to promote engineering as a positive career choice for young people.