Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships (AAQA) first edition: summary of key changes from Approval of Qualifications and Apprenticeships Handbook (AQAH)

Overall approach

1. The educational landscape has evolved significantly since the last Standards Review. The increasing diversity of qualifications available, including the development of Higher Apprenticeships and the introduction of the apprenticeship levy as well as the emergence of T levels posed significant challenges in defining recognition. Such recognition had not at that time been explicitly addressed in Engineering Council standards, regulations or guidance; beyond a sentence in the Approval of Qualifications and Apprenticeships Handbook (AQAH) 1st edition which stated that: "In development of Higher Apprenticeships (Level 4 and above) the information provided in this document will be relevant to those seeking approval of such apprenticeships". An exploratory workshop confirmed a need for a clear and consistent process for recognising higher apprenticeships that develop knowledge and/or skills required for IEng or CEng registration. This had significant implications for the review of AQAH, which until then, had focused primarily on the approval of qualifications and programmes leading to EngTech and ICT*Tech* registration.

2. AQAH was virtually re-written as a result and is now re-presented as the 'Approval and Accreditation of Qualifications and Apprenticeships' (AAQA): first edition 2020. As a result, it has not been practical to list a direct cross-reference of changes between the two documents.

Key changes

3. The following points highlight the key issues which were raised during the Standards Review consultation and which provided a focal point for the changes found in AAQA. This has also led to the positioning of AAQA as a Standard and not just a handbook. A diagram setting out the relationship of the Standards documents to each other is included at the beginning of AAQA.

4. There is now greater scope for, and flexibility in, approving or accrediting qualifications and apprenticeships. The most substantive changes are that AAQA introduces the option to accredit, provides a wider definition of qualifications, and allows recognition of programmes that support IEng and CEng, as well as EngTech and ICT*Tech*.

5. Greater clarity in defining 'approval' and 'accreditation' was required. It was widely agreed that global definitions of 'approve' and 'accredit' would simplify matters, both for those within and outside the profession. There are institutions for whom the proposed changes in terminology conflict with current practice. There were also references to the fact that both the current and proposed definitions might place undue emphasis on development of knowledge and should be defined to apply equally to acquisition of competence.

6. There was strong support for the emphasis on learning outcomes within AAQA rather than inputs (eg students' entry qualifications, curriculum content).

7. The latest review has seen an increase in learning outcomes relating to EngTech registration and inclusion of learning outcomes for other levels, both for full IEng and CEng and for intermediate levels. The learning outcomes are now presented in one table.

8. The complexities of approving qualifications in other countries was borne in mind when writing AAQA. Changes were made to reference the applicability of AAQA internationally as well as across the devolved nations, not just in England.

9. Competence statements in AAQA are presented in a single table and have also been revised in accordance with revisions to UK-SPEC. AAQA introduces intermediate competences between EngTech and IEng to support progression and recognition of apprenticeships and competence development schemes at these levels.

10. An in-depth review of the structure and format of all four Standards documents was undertaken, which included a Diversity and Inclusion review and a consistency check on language and terminology.

Other matters to consider

11. Consideration will be given in the future to the merging of AAQA with AHEP.However, because of the constantly evolving 'qualifications' landscape, AAQA will be reviewed in approximately 2 years' time. It may then be more timely to consider merging both Standards documents.

12. No guidance was published to support AQAH. However, guidance will be produced to support AAQA, particularly as it introduces intermediate competences and learning outcomes between the thresholds set for EngTech and IEng registration