



**FAB 2019**  
CONFERENCE, AWARDS AND EXHIBITION

# DIVERSITY AND CHOICE IN QUALIFICATIONS

THE NATIONAL FLAGSHIP CONFERENCE FOR AWARDING ORGANISATIONS

10-11 OCTOBER 2019



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**FAB 2019**  
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DIVERSITY AND CHOICE IN QUALIFICATIONS

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**FEWEEK**



# FE WEEK

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## Few can match FAB 2019 for importance in FE



**FRASER  
WHIELDON**

Reporter

**W**e cover our fair share of conferences at *FE Week*, but few could match the Federation of Awarding Bodies annual shindig in terms of the importance of its topics.

This year's conference comes at a pivotal time for awarding organisations, considering the fast-approaching roll-out of T-levels, ongoing problems with the capability to provide end-point assessment for an ever-growing list of apprenticeship standards, and of course, the uncertainty and instability surrounding Brexit.

So, what awarding bodies hear and took away from FAB 2019 will carry great significance far beyond the next results day.

And they certainly had a lot to listen to and take away from the jam-packed conference, held over two days, which we

have covered in this 16-page supplement.

First up, we cover two keynote addresses: from FAB chair Paul Eeles, who is calling for a dedicated skills minister and to give qualification exports rocket boosters after Gavin Williamson said he would supercharge FE opportunities.

There is also our story on Sally Collier's three questions to awarding bodies on assessment expertise, cyber security, and accountability, followed by the chair of the independent commission on examination malpractice Sir John Dunford, who spoke at the conference both as a keynote and during a workshop.

Conference also heard from representatives from government, including the Department for Education's deputy director for technical education Lucy Andrew, and the Department for International Trade's technical and vocational education and training specialist Jonathan Ledger.

One of, if not the biggest highlight of the conference was the FAB awards and dinner, where seven winners picked up awards for qualification of the year, awarding organisation of the year and learner of the year after winning out over a record number of applications.



**Q**ualifications face the biggest shake-up in a generation. The apprenticeship reforms – six years on – are still not yet fully formed.

Across the UK, the tectonic plates of reforms are shifting. In England, the secretary of state, Gavin Williamson, announced the goal of planning the next decade to overtake Germany in technical education.

Ministers have given no account of how this might happen. Neither have they acknowledged that, in many ways, Britain is already ahead of Germany in this space.

Politicians often proclaim these long-term ambitions, knowing full well, that they are very unlikely to be around when the day of reckoning comes.

In 2006, on the back of the Leitch Review of Skills, Gordon Brown talked of the 'global skills race'. The Treasury then set out a number of bold targets to be delivered by 2020. They included the mantra of Germanic-style technical skills and levels of productivity.

As we approach the end of this century's second decade, the only one of Leitch's targets to be met is the one expanding higher education participation to 50 per cent of the population.

In other words, when taxpayers underwrite the full cost of delivery, political targets are more likely to be achieved.

When governments cut skills funding or they rely too heavily on the engagement of employers, things become trickier.

Navigating all this uncertainty is the day-to-day reality for many working in the awarding and assessment industry.

At FAB 2019 – the annual conference of the Federation of Awarding Bodies – we heard

**TOM  
BEWICK**

Chief executive,  
Federation of Awarding Bodies



## Skills and qualifications landscape still a 'work in progress'

from a number of industry and sector leaders: platform speakers and panelists talked about the tremendous resilience of an FE sector that has seen a reduction of 2.2 million youth and adult learning opportunities in the past 5 years.

We heard from one FE college principal, Verity Hancock, who explained how her institution had implemented a 40 per cent reduction in baseline funding since 2010 – adversely affecting social mobility and the local community.

Listening to all the thoughtful and brilliant contributions from participants, I departed Leicester with a number of observations about the future of qualifications and skills policy.

Firstly, the devolved administrations, including

the Department for Education, should work more closely together to offset some of the downsides of devolution.

This includes better management of the growing UK-wide regulatory burden placed on awarding bodies.

Increased regulatory costs ultimately affect what resources can be spent on frontline teaching and learning.

It is in the interests of policymakers and everyone to more effectively engage.

For example, changes to English qualifications are already adversely impacting on the marketplace for learners in Northern Ireland.

Secondly, the planned review of qualifications

in England could just end up further kicking away the ladder of opportunity from people if it is not handled really sensitively.

New T-Levels have a lot going for them in terms of providing skilled pathways to employment for 16-19 year olds, but they are complementary – not necessarily a replacement for – already successful technical and vocational qualifications in the marketplace.

This is particularly the case for adults who will require the ongoing choice of flexible qualifications to meet the demands of changing employment patterns; particularly in the age of the so-called fourth industrial revolution.

Thirdly, it was very apparent that the apprenticeship reforms have reached a critical juncture.

We heard from a representative from the Federation of Small Businesses, who reminded us that starts have fallen by about 20 per cent since 2016.

Crucially, small and micro-businesses have been turned away from taking on apprentices because of funding shortages.

Meanwhile, the external quality assurance (EQA) of apprenticeships continues to be a Horlicks.

From November 1, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education will introduce a new EQA charges regime for the standards it is responsible for.

Ofqual provides the same service for free. These issues illustrate just some of the anomalies and frustrations that conference participants were grumbling about. It all adds up to a skills and qualifications landscape that is still very much a 'work in progress.'

# FAB chair makes 5 wishes to education secretary

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
**FRASER@FEWEEK.CO.UK**

**F**ederation of Awarding Bodies chair Paul Eeles made five wishes to education secretary Gavin Williamson to kick off the membership organisation's annual conference.

His first request was the return of a dedicated skills and apprenticeships minister.

After Anne Milton quit the role ahead of Boris Johnson becoming prime minister, the FE and skills brief was taken up by Williamson when he was appointed.

But he shared responsibilities with Lord Agnew, Kemi Badenoch and then Michelle Donelan when Badenoch went on paternity leave.

On Williamson taking up the role, Eeles said: "I admire his interest in FE and the work he is doing."

"But that is not the same as having a daily ministerial champion like we had in Anne Milton."

He also called for a move to a single regulator for all external quality assurance

for apprenticeships, saying: "I will be encouraging Gavin Williamson to work with us and Ofqual, the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education, and the Office for Students, in finding more efficient ways to externally quality assure our apprenticeship model in future."

"That means funding EQA as a national infrastructure cost; and ironing out many of the inconsistencies that have resulted because of a lack of a singular regulatory approach."

"It means ensuring a level regulatory playing field for all EPAOs – regardless of whether they have operated in the assessment market for 10 years or 10 minutes."

Under FAB's designs, the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education would remain legally in charge of EQA, but Ofqual would lead on it in the future. The current professional and employer bodies would then work to the single EQA regulator as subject matter experts.

Eeles also used his speech to warn the government not to "kick away the ladder of opportunity under people, adult learners and vast parts of the

country," with its reviews of qualification programmes at below level 3, and at levels 4 and 5.

His objections follow fears that the government's consultation on plans to withdraw funding for thousands of applied general qualifications, including BTECs, is manipulation of the market to ensure T-levels are a success.

While Eeles said FAB supports T-levels, he added that the potential "real problem" is that the "underlying thinking is one of the state saying to learners, employers and the wider economy, that 'it knows best'".

The government ought not to "throw the baby out with the bath water", he said, and should recognise "there are lots of other world-class qualifications already competing in this space".

"We need to continue with a diverse qualifications marketplace driven by the needs and ambitions of learners."

Eeles also reiterated FAB's call for the DfE to establish an independent reference panel to review the needs of the market before the secretary of state makes any future decisions on which qualifications to fund.



Paul Eeles

Lastly, the chair wants to "put rocket boosters under" the continued export potential of the UK's "world-class" qualifications, and called on Williamson to work more closely with the devolved administrations, the Department for International Trade and regulators to do just that.

He said that over one million Ofqual-regulated qualifications were exported by FAB members last year.

Eeles' speech was made ahead of a meeting with Williamson on October 28, where FAB will put these points to him.

## Reform is the issue for FE, not money, says ex-AoC boss

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
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**F**unding is not the main issue facing further education in the long-term, it's how the government's reform programme will move forward, a former Association of Colleges chief told FAB 2019.

Speaking on the first day of conference, Martin Doel said: "Money is clearly the issue tomorrow and next year, but not in three years."

"I don't find anyone in government saying we need to make further savings in FE."

Instead, the issue was how to go about reforming the sector.

In the UK, Doel believes: "We tend not to tend to the fundamentals before we take the first step."

"We take one step, then the next, then the next – then wonder, how did we end up here?"

Doel, who now works as a professor

of leadership in FE, posed a number of scenarios for delegates as the reform programme progressed: should providers be collaborating or competing? Should the focus be on local or national opportunities for learners? How do providers handle giving people a second chance at education while making themselves first choice for others? Is it about education for life or training for a job?

He also used the six questions from Kipling's poem, Six Honest Serving Men, to pose more "fundamental" questions of FE reform: what is to be taught – knowledge and skills? Who should be the teachers? Where should it be taught – referring more to controlled conditions and simulations? How should it be taught – which referred to the breakdown between theory and practical? How should it be assessed – which went back to talk about controlling conditions?

FE had to get such fundamental questions right, he said, to fight back against "the gravitational pull of the academic in this country," which Doel said

was his "bête noire".

And if the UK is to meet Gavin Williamson's target to overtake Germany in the opportunities for technical

education, Doel thought: "We need to be the rival of Germany in our own sense with a system which fits our economy and our skills requirement."



Martin Doel



# Ofqual chief has three questions for AOs

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Ofqual's chief regulator has tasked awarding organisations with answering three questions as part of the watchdog's work on ensuring "public confidence" in qualifications.

Addressing the first day of conference, Sally Collier said she wanted AOs to "be in the best shape you can be" and it was "the time for you to take stock of your capacity and capability".

In order to ensure this, she posed three questions that she said were at the top of the watchdog's mind:

1. Do you have enough assessment expertise in your organisation – people who really know how to design, develop, deliver and review qualifications? And if you don't employ such people, how can you access them on a sustainable basis?
2. Is your technology, and your technology expertise, up to the challenge of facing the increased risk posed by cyber threats and keeping your data safe?
3. If you are a responsible officer, do you know what is expected of you, in terms of fulfilling your obligations as the key accountable person?

Reaction at the conference on whether Collier's questions were helpful was mixed.

Louise Bangham, the quality assurance manager from Safety Training Awards, said she was "on the fence", saying the expertise question was important as "we all have to have the competence for the assessments to make sure they are all fit for purpose".

But the technology expertise "depended on the organisation," as some will bring in contractors to get their systems into place.

"It is an important question, but I don't know if it's fitting for AOs."

Sarah Edmonds, a former FAB board member who has just stepped down from being a responsible officer at Active IQ, said she "absolutely" thought the questions were helpful.

This was because the questions responsible officers have to answer are much more "focused" and "clearly articulated" than in the past, when AOs had to discern what regulators meant by their questions and whether there were any "hidden messages".

She also agreed the technology question would be helpful, as "we're all mindful of technology, its advances and what's



Sally Collier

**We all have to have the competence for the assessments to make sure they are all fit for purpose**

possible and what is not".

However, she added: "You have such a wide variety of awarding organisations where many people wear many hats and it is sometimes a challenge to them with the sheer heft of the role."

Collier also used her speech to criticise the "rather superficial media coverage" of a recommendation by the independent commission on exam malpractice around banning watches in exams.

She said many of the commission's proposals were "far more important" and will have implications for qualifications.

This, and much of her speech, was

focused on Ofqual's attempts to crack down on qualification malpractice.

At the start of October, Ofqual launched a consultation on introducing fixed penalty notices and rebukes for organisations found to be flouting official regulations.

And in February, Ofqual announced it would start auditing awarding organisations on the "control" they have over their individual providers after concerns were raised over AOs only moderating assessments after results had been issued – what is known as a direct claims status.



# Overtaking Germany will take productivity and mentality boost, says ex-education committee chair

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
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**G**avin Williamson's challenge to overtake Germany and the Far East in technical education requires a productivity and mentality boost in the UK, a former education select committee chair has said.

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**That told me something about the mentality of Porsche generally**

Speaking at conference about his Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group's upcoming report into the apprenticeship system, Neil Carmichael discussed a trip to Porsche's factory in Leipzig, where he saw colleges, schools and universities were included in the supply chain.

“That told me something about the mentality of Porsche generally and actually, more widely, a question of what we need to do about engaging the education sector with the world of business,” he said.

He said the UK was “obsessive” about GCSEs, A-levels and “driving people into universities, when in fact other choices should be made and encouraged”.

Germany's productivity is also 28 per cent higher than the UK's, said Carmichael, which he said showed how important qualifications and training are: “Because we have to plug those into the system and make sure our economy really revs, rather than simply ticks over.”

His work with the Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group has taken him to countries like China and Myanmar, which are looking to emulate the UK's system of qualifications.

He told the delegates: “People there really think what they should be doing is what we do.

“I sometimes think to myself ‘really?’, but that is our reputation.”

However, while apparently ahead in qualifications, the UK is falling behind

countries like China economically: while its growth has slowed down to six per cent, Carmichael said, that is still four per cent higher than the UK's average.

His comments on Germany and the Far East come after education secretary Gavin Williamson announced at the Conservative Party conference his ambition to “overtake Germany in the opportunities we offer to those studying technical routes by 2029”.

Williamson later promised the Daily Mail a “Singapore-style revolution” in technical and vocational courses.

The Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group, which includes FAB chief executive Tom Bewick, will be releasing its report to coincide with National Apprenticeship Week 2020.

The report, Carmichael said, will focus on five key areas, including the role of stakeholders in the system, seeing if they have the right resources.

It will also cover SMEs, which the Association of Employment and Learning Providers found in August were clamouring for apprentices, but providers could not meet their demand because of shortages in the apprenticeship budget; AELP chief executive Mark Dawe is also on the group.

Carmichael's group, which is run by Pearson, is looking at the policy behind SMEs to make sure they can grow and are able to employ the right people, able to train those people and able to use apprenticeships “properly and carefully”.

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**I sometimes think to myself ‘really?’, but that is our reputation**

Another area the group will be reviewing is end-point assessment, with Carmichael saying: “I think that we need to review EPA and I have had a discussion about that here and we are indeed having a key discussion within the group about EPA.”

The fifth point the group's report will address is progression, as Carmichael said it was “absolutely essential” that it was worthwhile, transparent, and made sense for the economy of tomorrow.



Neil Carmichael



# Communication key to tackling malpractice

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Communication is the key to tackling cheating in exams, especially as students do not fully understand plagiarism and its penalties, says the chair of the independent commission on examination malpractice.

Sir John Dunford spoke at FAB 2019 about his commission's recommendations, which were released last month and caught public attention for proposing a ban on smart watches.

But Dunford told delegates the most important thing he would promote from the report is the need for communications from awarding bodies to assessment centres.

Awarding bodies, he said, "will want to put out messages to create a malpractice-free environment that need to go to the person in charge of exams.

"But others might need to go to centre heads, to the teaching staff about how to conduct assessments, and some messages most certainly to the students, giving them specific advice on avoiding malpractice and its consequences."

One of the recommendations of the report was that before students start a season of exams, they sign a paper saying they understand what malpractice is and the consequences if they commit it.

"I think that would help to focus the mind really well," said Dunford.

## They didn't really understand plagiarism and the potential penalties for it

This came about after a survey for the commission of 1,844 learners aged 16 to 19 on their perception of malpractice found just 57 per cent saw 'looking at someone



Sir John Dunford

else's coursework before it is submitted' as malpractice.

Less than half said allowing another person to look at your coursework before it was submitted was acceptable and should carry no punishment.

And only 59 per cent saw paraphrasing ideas, work or words of other people without referencing it as malpractice; a fifth saw that as acceptable and should carry no punishment.

While the findings did not aim to be generalisable, Dunford said it showed the commission: "They didn't actually really understand a lot of what malpractice was, or understand plagiarism and the potential penalties for it."

Dunford said the commission's strongest

recommendation was that every exam and assessment centre, in both general and vocational qualifications, should adopt an ethical culture.

This meant, for example, learners and staff members should be able to report malpractice and trust it will be investigated fairly.

Asked whether an ethical culture would be a policy requirement for centres, he said while it would be easy to place a requirement on the centres, what was much more important was what he called "the flavour of communication awarding bodies have with centres".

This meant constantly keeping centres up to speed with developments, making them aware of wider malpractice issues and

emphasising examples of how an ethical culture is carried out in other places.

During his speech, Dunford also defended the commission's recommended ban on smart watches, which had been "headlined by the media".

He argued the commission had been "absolutely right" to propose the ban as it was "very difficult to tell the difference between a smart watch and another one".

Earlier that day, Ofqual chief regulator Sally Collier had used her speech to criticise the "rather superficial media coverage" of the commission's recommendation.

She said many of the commission's proposals were "far more important" and will have implications for qualifications.



# Centre-concern notices proposed after malpractice perpetrators hopped around awarding bodies

**A**warding organisations could be told about providers mired in malpractice concerns, after Ofqual found centres were swapping AOs following malpractice findings, the regulator told FAB 2019.

Ofqual's associate director of legal, moderation and enforcement Rosalind Jackson told delegates about recent examples where: "We had significant concerns about schools, colleges or training providers (centres) that have had a number of malpractice findings against them.

"Centres can hop around lots of different awarding organisations offering similar qualifications when they have had malpractice findings made against them."

This month, Ofqual launched a consultation on amending its regulatory action policy, which included a proposal to issue notices to awarding organisations detailing the regulator's concerns about a specific centre.

Currently, the consultation document says, a centre's original awarding

organisation will tip off other organisations the centre might target.

But Jackson said: "We recognise that it is not always possible to identify all the potential organisations that might be affected."

She continued: "Obviously this would need to be evidence-based and we would have regard to what those findings have been and we would want organisations to have regard to that information before entering into any arrangements with that centre."

She said this evidence would be based on the findings of malpractice, rather than being based on intelligence and concerns from awarding organisations.

The director of Jackson's department Matthew Humphrey, who was also speaking at conference, said a notice would be based on "strong findings" and Ofqual would "at the very least" notify a centre of a notice to help ensure the watchdog is acting on valid information and the centre has an opportunity to discuss it.



Rosalind Jackson

"You might see a circumstance where a centre says 'we have got appeals procedures against malpractice findings and we don't want you to do it now because we think we are going to win all the appeals'.

"That's something we want to be able to

take into account when deciding whether we give notice or not."

Other changes Ofqual is consulting on, until December 2, include public rebukes of awarding organisations that are not complying with rules and fixed penalty notices for breaches of conditions.

# DfE quiet on education secretary's skills and productivity board and level 3 consultation results

**T**he Department for Education had "not a lot of detail" to give FAB 2019 about the education secretary's flagship skills and productivity board, or findings from its level 3 and below review.

When asked for details on the board, which Gavin Williamson announced at the Conservative Party conference, the department's deputy director for technical education Lucy Andrew said: "I don't have a lot of detail that goes with it at the moment."

But she said it would give "expert analysis of the skills and training that add the most value to the economy" and would be "helpful in future decision-making about those things".

She was also not in a position to release any findings from the first stage of the government's review of qualifications at level 3 and below, or detail its next steps, as "we're still going through all this with our new ministerial team".

But she said it had confirmed a lot of things the department had said in the consultation: that it needs to work for all students; the department needs to understand what is and isn't working currently; and the DfE needs to introduce change at a pace that the sector can accommodate.

As the consultation moves towards stage two of the consultation, which is expected to launch in spring 2020, Andrew said: "We want to continue the conversations we've been having with FAB and its members.

"It's really important to us to understand what works and what doesn't."

On the consultation about reforming higher technical education, qualifications at level 4 and 5, Andrew said the department was considering the responses from the consultation, which closed in September.

They will be talking to ministers about the findings and next steps over the coming months; so, they expect to respond



Lucy Andrew

in early 2020.

Andrew also ran through other FE reforms the DfE has been working on: including the new Institutes of Technology,

which will "sit alongside" National Colleges – which were launched around four years ago and since then, one has dissolved and another has changed its remit.



# FEDERATION OF AWARDING BODIES

THE VOICE OF THE QUALIFICATIONS AND ASSESSMENTS INDUSTRY

The Federation of Awarding Bodies is the collective voice of the awarding and assessment sector. Our full members are awarding organisations and end-point assessment organisations that are regulated by one of the public regulators governing qualifications in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland (i.e. Ofqual, SQA, Qualifications Wales and CCEA). Other end-point assessment organisations are able to access our services through associate membership.

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Awarding organisation of the year - Signature



# FAB AWARD WINNER

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A provider of British Sign Language qualifications and an engineering awarding organisation were among the winners of this year's Federation of Awarding Bodies awards.

FAB's fifth celebration of the awarding and assessment sector was a glitzy ceremony in Leicester, attended by over 230 experts in awarding and assessment.

Chief executive of FAB Tom Bewick said the membership organisation received a "record number" of entries to

the awards this year and the standard was "exceptionally high".

"The FAB Awards is an opportunity for the industry to come together to celebrate success and share good practice and all of the winners were deserving of their award," he added.

The panel of judges included UCL Institute of Education professor and former Association of Colleges chief executive Martin Doel, head of apprenticeships and HR business partner for Coca-Cola European Partners Sharon Blyfield, and innovation and human potential consultant and transformation coach Nicola Darke.

“

**An opportunity  
for the industry  
to come together  
to celebrate  
success and share  
good practice**

The winner of Awarding Organisation of the Year was Signature, a provider of British Sign Language and deaf and deafblind qualifications.

The judges said this was for providing "highly valuable and socially-connective qualifications with an innovative approach and a distinctive assessment methodology", which made a "real difference not only to a defined community, but to help integrate different communities".

The award for Qualification of the Year went to Excellence, Achievement & Learning (EAL), which earlier in October also won its bid to develop,





Exporter of the year - NCC Education



Innovation of the year - EA



Collaboration of the year - Association of Business Executives (ABE) with United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO)



Helen Bull, learner of the year



Outstanding contribution - Marie Porter



Qualification of the year - EAL

# WINNERS 2019 UNVEILED

deliver and award the second wave of T-levels.

EAL won for its level 3 award in the Requirements of Fire Detection and Fire Alarm Systems for Buildings. The judges said this qualification “goes towards saving lives” and is “designed to remove the barriers to take-up”.

The engineering and advanced manufacturing awarding organisation also won Innovation of the Year for Engineering Talent, a means of accessing training resources online.

“It enables learners to navigate their way through the industry end-to-end, making it a more effective way to engage,

“

**[Marie impressed the judges] by changing lives and empowering others to do the same**

educate and get employed,” judges said.

The winners of the Collaboration of the Year award were Association of Business Executives and United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

The judging panel picked them for “assisting learners to gain confidence and contribute to the economy”.

Helen Bull won Learner of the Year with her IQL UK qualification for her “outstanding achievement as a learner and for demonstrating strength and determination to continue with her qualification while paying it forward to support others”.

After being nominated by the Chartered Institute of Housing, Marie Porter from Phoenix Community Housing was awarded Outstanding Contribution of the Year.

She impressed judges “by changing lives and empowering others to do the same”.

And exporter of the year was awarded to NCC Education after it adapted its programmes to the relevant markets “while still maintaining quality and removing the stigma around online learning”.

These seven winners were selected from 34 finalists across all categories.



# Panel discussion: Sector leaders signal warning to incoming IfATE chief on level 2 and SMEs



Left to right: Cindy Rampersaud, Senior vice president, BTEC and Apprenticeships at Pearson Education; Chinara Rustamova, Senior policy advisor, Federation of Small Businesses; Charlotte Bosworth, chair of Federation of Awarding Bodies EPAO group; and Neil Carmichael, chair of The Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group.

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
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**S**ector leaders at FAB 2019 advised incoming Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education chief Jennifer Coupland to focus on T-levels and replacing level 2 frameworks.

On an apprenticeship panel at conference, the Federation of Small Businesses' senior policy advisor Chinara Rustamova said that Coupland, who is due to start at the institute next month, should focus on developing standards to replace frameworks which are being withdrawn next year.

Especially important was to replace the level 2 business administration framework; whereas otherwise, Rustamova warned, there would be a "huge gap and I don't know how that's going to be filled".

She had been "amazed" by how many apprentices were completing the business administration framework, and knew training providers had been pointing out when it was withdrawn small businesses would no longer be able to engage with level

2 apprenticeships.

"But that's not just about business administration. I think it applies to a big number of level 2 frameworks, and they're absolutely essential."

“

## It's a really, really important area we need to focus on

Former education select committee chair Neil Carmichael, who now heads up the Independent Apprenticeship Policy Group and was also on the panel, "completely" agreed and said the "building block" that is level 2 needed support from the sector.

Pearson's senior vice president for BTEC and apprenticeships Cindy Rampersaud

worried what would happen to 16-year-olds who had not achieved a level 2 if there were fewer options to do so.

"It's a really, really important area we need to focus on," she said.

In June, the IfATE rejected a proposed standard to replace the business administration framework because it did not "meet the minimum criteria for an apprenticeship".

That decision "disappointed" a number of stakeholders, including the NHS and Association of Employment and Learning Providers, leading the IfATE to promise to explore options such as traineeships to support young people to access the business administrator standard at level 3.

The other panellists' advice to Coupland included Rampersaud saying the apprenticeship system still needed tweaking to be sustainable: "I think we're not that far off, but there are things around end-point assessment and small-to-medium enterprises we need to address."

Rustamova advised the incoming IfATE boss to focus on T-levels, which the institute took responsibility for in January and

which Coupland has been working on in her role as director of professional and technical education at the Department for Education.

"She will bring that background and hopefully it strengthens the institute's approach to T-levels," Rustamova said.

Carmichael said it was "absolutely essential" for a change of culture in vocational education in the country and IfATE could be its champion.

"I think the IfATE has a huge opportunity to alter the terms of discussion about where we are in the sector.

"I think it could bring some real visionary leadership, which is up-front and courageous enough to challenge the government on some of the points we've all made this morning.

"But also to capture this big debate which runs to the core of our education system, which is: 'why are we so obsessed with academic achievement and we turn ourselves away from the rest?' and the rest is so important and counts for the bigger half actually of what we are supposed to be doing."



# UK already beating Germany in technical qualification exports, says government trade expert

**FRASER WHIELDON**  
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**T**he UK is already beating Germany in technical qualification exports, according to the government – but they are not sure by how much.

The Department for International Trade's technical and vocational education and training (TVET) specialist Jonathan Ledger said at conference: "When we look at competitors, Canada, Australia, Germany are the front runners in most people's thinking."

"Actually, I believe that we outrun them and Canada and Australia borrow our system anyway so customers might as well come and talk to the masters, rather than somebody else."

“

**Canada, Australia, Germany are the front runners in most people's thinking**

However, on how much overseas activity in TVET is worth to the UK economy, Ledger admitted: "I haven't got a bloody clue."

"We have no data; we don't even know how many qualifications from the Ofqual register are delivered beyond the border of Dover."

For example, Ledger had met a delegate at conference who operated in 70 countries with over 800 centres, which Ledger did not know about.

So, while the higher education sector can report its overseas activity brings £20 billion into the economy, the departments for education and international trade cannot present a similar case to ministers.

According to the Federation of Awarding Bodies, its members exported over one million Ofqual-regulated qualifications last year.



FAB chair Paul Eeles said in his keynote speech to conference he would be telling education secretary Gavin Williamson to work with devolved administrations, regulators from every country in the UK, and the Department for International Trade "so that we can really put rocket boosters under the continued export potential of UK qualifications".

Ofqual will require awarding organisations to provide data on certificates awarded overseas from January 2020.

This was not for a negative purpose, Ledger said, but rather to develop a positive narrative around TVET exports to persuade ministers of their benefit.

If ministers could be persuaded, Ledger said he would like to see a change of legislation allowing Ofqual or another body a wider remit over international certification.

But in the meantime, he said there was

plenty to be positive about: while the UK's apprenticeship system may attract ire domestically, internationally it is widely loved.

This is because the UK system, which involves employers and frequent adjustment, is regarded for being "flexible and dynamic and shifting on a penny," as opposed to something like the German system, which is so "rigid" it only works there and in Austria and Switzerland, said Ledger.

He added the Germans are "actually always looking at the UK for the bits that make their system even better", and the way the UK develops qualifications, works with employers, and delivers apprenticeships has already been successfully imported to countries like Panama, Brazil and Vietnam.

"They really do want British, everyone around the world, and I think in this

country we are a bit ignorant as to how much value the UK flag has.

"But around the world they really do want what we're offering."

“

**Around the world they really do want what we're offering**

Ledger attributed this to "always learning from other countries": "The UK has a system we have grown from being a global organisation and I guess we soak up all the best bits and try and bring some of that back."



# ASK THE AOs: BREXIT AND T-LEVELS CHIEF CONFERENCE CONCERNS

**B**rexit and T-levels are what's keeping awarding bodies up at night, according to the responses *FE Week* got from a number of delegates on the conference floor.

*FE Week* took to the stalls and coffee tables on day two of FAB 2019 to ask awarding organisations what is the biggest issue affecting their sector, and what had they learned from conference.

It produced a range of opinions, with some delegates opting for Brexit and its associated instability, others for the roll-out of T-levels, and some for the

sheer challenge of running an awarding organisation really well.

As for what they learned from conference, many delegates said that the best aspect for them is networking with other awarding organisations, with others saying they came to hear from FAB's line-up of expert speakers.

But all of them came to learn something new, whether it was about a new product or piece of software, to learn if they had the right idea of what regulators wanted in mind, and some to find out what other awarding organisations were up to.



## What is the biggest issue AOs are facing?



**JENNY PATRICKSON**  
Managing director, Active IQ

"I would say obviously there is the T-level rollout, which for many awarding organisations isn't necessarily the way they want to go in. We're a small specialist organisation in the health and physical activity sector, so we were kind of bypassed in the route maps for T-levels, so it's not really an option for us. And of course, the threat to level 2 and higher-level qualifications that are coming into the consultation."



**LOUISE DORREN**  
Team manager of review and regulation, City & Guilds

"I think apprenticeships probably is one of the biggest things coming in and you've got the levy. Companies are having to pay that, so making sure it is a worthwhile qualification for people."



**SIMON STEVENS**  
Head of qualifications, Swim England

"For me it's the lack of clarity in what's going to happen next year, let alone the next five years because of Brexit. Preparing ourselves for what could happen and what couldn't happen as well."



**IAN GURLING**  
Awarding organisation manager, FIAAO

"I think it's probably, for me at least, accurately recognising difficulty level. Accurately recognising what are different levels of qualifications. Otherwise there's definitely a market for them."



**KATHY MERRETT**  
Quality and performance manager, FDQ

"As an awarding organisation that's delivering EPAs as well, it is organising EPAs across the country for multiple customers and the logistics of getting independent examiners in the right place at the right time to do the right exam. We're doing it really well, but it really is hard work to get it done."



## What have you learned from conference?



**AMY MATTHEWS**

Quality and compliance officer, ICM

"The most beneficial thing for me is you get to see all the stalls and you find so many really, really essential programmes and online systems you never knew about as an awarding organisation. When you come here and see all the people, you can make the best decision on what you need as an organisation and it opens up a massive area of things you didn't even feel were possible."



**ADAIR FORD**

Chief executive, ICM

"I think the best thing about this conference is the networking side. It's about meeting people, networking, talking about what they want, what's happening in the industry and understanding the products being offered now. That for me is how this conference really helps our business."



**ELLIE CAMPBELL**

Delivery and development manager, ICM

"I've learnt that when you work in an awarding organisation, you have some ideas and theories yourself. And when you come to these events where they have expert speakers, they validate those ideas and theories so you know you're on the right course. And you find the concerns we have as an organisation are shared by many others."



**REBECCA AMIS**

Project coordinator, Scottish Qualifications Authority

"The best thing is the opportunity to hear what the regulators have to say and other countries' approaches and find out what is beyond their written documents, their guidance, their conditions, and find out their direction of travel. It gives you advanced warning of things you have to look out for, changes that are coming your way and what that means for your organisation in terms of resourcing."



**TAHIR MOHAMMED**

Qualifications coordinator, Scottish Qualifications Authority

"This is my first time at this conference. It's a really good networking opportunity to learn from other awarding organisations: how do they do it and what they do. It's good for them to learn from us as well. Another thing is it's very good to hear from the experts as well."







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