

MINUTES



IFATE APPROVALS AND POLICY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting title: IfATE Approvals and Policy Assurance Committee
Meeting date: 10 January 2024
Protective marking: Official

Board members present: Dr Kate Barclay (KB) (Chair) (via teleconference); Neil Morrison (NM) (via teleconference); Bev Robinson CBE (BR) (via teleconference); Jane Hadfield (via teleconference); Mark McClennon (via teleconference).

IfATE officials present: Rob Nitsch, Delivery Director (RN); Dr Rachel Cooper, Strategy Director (RC); Carmel Grant, Deputy Director, Commissioning and Development (CG); Lucy Rigler, Deputy Director, Skills System Strategy and Oversight (LR); Simon Love (SL), Head of Governance; Martin Keeves, Co-lead of Funding Community of Practice (MK) (item 4 only); Senior Policy and Strategy Advisor, Policy and New Concepts Division (AD) (item 5 only); Governance Manager (Secretariat).

Other stakeholders present: Neil Atkinson, Chair of Transport and Logistics Route Panel (item 3 only); Jean-Noël Ezingard, Chair of Education and Early Years Route Panel (item 3 only); Stephen Allaker, Chair of Legal, Finance and Accounting Route Panel (item 3 only); Jude Capper, Chair of Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care Route Panel (item 3 only).

Apologies: None.

Item 1. Welcome, introductions and conflicts of interest

1. The Chair welcomed members and officials to the meeting, including Jane Hadfield and Mark McClennon who were observing the meeting as new IfATE board members. No apologies for absence were received. Members were informed that Malcolm Press had stepped down from APAC and noted with thanks his contribution to both APAC and AFC, its predecessor committee.
2. The Chair asked board members whether they had any new declarations of conflict of interest to make. The Chair reminded board members that should a potential or actual conflict arise by virtue of their other interests (outlined in the declaration of interests) then it must be raised at the outset of the relevant meeting which deals with the issue giving rise to the actual or potential conflict. No new declarations were made.

Item 2. Minutes and actions from the last meeting

3. The draft minutes of the 8 November APAC meeting were approved without amendment.

4. Members reviewed the action log and noted the progress against open actions. In relation to the open action regarding T Level assessment requirements, members requested that officials engage with Department for Education (DfE) and Ofqual colleagues to ensure that assessments were appropriate, scalable and fit for employers' needs.

Item 3. Route Panel Chairs Panel report

5. The Chair welcomed to the meeting the chairs of the Transport & Logistics, Education & Early Years, Legal, Finance and Accounting, and Agriculture, Environmental and Animal Care route panels.
6. RN outlined that since route panel (RP) chairs last met with APAC in October 2022, officials had worked to address the issues raised at that meeting. These had included making more effective use of RP time by increasing the proportion of time spent on gaining employer insights rather than receiving briefings from officials, and on working toward increasing the diversity of entrants across all routes. RN noted that the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Toolkit had been updated as part of the launch of IfATE's EDI Strategy and that this was being used to ensure occupational standards are as inclusive as possible.
7. The RP chairs introduced themselves and gave an overview of the successes and challenges faced by their respective panels. Recruitment to RPs had been challenging, though it was felt that even the smaller route panels had good coverage in terms of diversity, geographical spread and sector-specific expertise. Members agreed that improving the recruitment and onboarding of route panel members should continue to be a focus for route teams. Members also requested that the RPs prioritise work on the route strategies over the coming year and encourage their members to act as advocates for RP work.
8. The RP chairs stated that their RPs valued their interactions with trailblazer groups and suggested that guidance could be prepared to shape balanced discussions and collaborative working. RP chairs also praised the support provided by IfATE officials, and commented that although well supported, their responsibilities were wide-ranging and that it would be beneficial to review the role of the RP chair.
9. Members asked RP chairs how the system of engagement with RPs and trailblazers might be improved, and were informed that the existing system had evolved over time and generally worked well. RP chairs suggested that a planned cycle of research to identify sector skills gaps may be beneficial when considering occupation proposals, and members asked officials to contact the DfE unit for future skills to request any insights they may have.

Item 4. Functioning of the approvals process

10. MK introduced the item, which provided a summary of the outcomes of the work undertaken following the board decision to delegate approval authority to the IfATE executive. The review was intended to be future-facing and ensure that all decisions were taken at the appropriate level in light of IfATE's increased responsibilities under the Skills Act. The review had involved the development of an internal approvals committee with a rigorous control framework and an implemented continuous improvement cycle.
11. Members asked whether there had been a change in the proportion of occupational proposals rejected by the approvals committee in comparison to the decisions made by board members at the former Approval and Funding Committee. RN advised that a direct comparison would be imprecise as the new process enabled issues to be identified earlier, leading to fewer rejections at the final approval stage. Members suggested that the approvals committee Terms of Reference (ToR) could be improved by clarification that the

Strategy Directors should chair the meeting in the absence of the Delivery Director, noting that this had not yet been necessary.

12. Members asked whether the approvals committee was adequately linked with APAC. MK advised that the project team were grateful to APAC members for their advice and oversight throughout the process and that no additional support was expected to be needed.

Item 5. Trailblazer engagement

13. AD introduced the item and provided APAC with an account of actions taken as part of the trailblazer review project requested by APAC at its 28 June 2023 meeting. Actions had been focused on developing an approach to trailblazers that maximised the unique insights of employers, capitalised on data, innovations, and optimised a range of expertise.
14. AD advised that key stakeholders had welcomed the review and endorsed the project focus, and that DfE was keen to see changes that would help to speed up the way standards are reviewed. Stakeholders had emphasised that there should not be a significant departure from the foundations of IfATE's current approach, which holds employer expertise at its centre. Three imperatives had been central to the review: providing engagement options for employers; taking a flexible risk-based approach to trailblazer activity; and utilising data and digital developments to support trailblazers.
15. Members asked if the proposals put forward by the project team would lessen the feeling of an overly high workload that had been expressed by trailblazers at the June APAC meeting. AD responded that the trailblazer reference panel had been consulted and had welcomed the proposals.
16. Members asked if there were any recommendations that could be implemented quickly, to demonstrate that IfATE had prioritised the feedback from trailblazer groups. AD and LR advised that some changes had already been implemented and that others were due to be implemented shortly. There were some recommendations that would be delivered later as they were dependent upon wider changes in IfATE's data and digital capability.

Item 6. Operational report

17. RN provided an update on IfATE's operations and delivery performance, including on the progress made toward the Prime Minister's challenge to review 100 apprenticeships by the end of December 2023. RN reported that 127 apprenticeships had been reviewed by the end of 2023.

Item 7. APAC workplan and future developments

18. Members considered proposals to alter the remit and responsibilities of APAC to focus on IfATE products and impact. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that IfATE's board committees had a balanced workload and were not overburdened, and that their ToR were clear and coordinated. Members undertook to provide additional feedback by correspondence.

Item 8. Any other business

19. The Chair thanked members and officials for their participation and confirmed that the next APAC meeting would take place on 6 March.

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