

## IFATE APPROVALS AND POLICY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE

Meeting title: IfATE Approvals and Policy Assurance Committee  
Meeting date: 06 March 2024  
Protective marking: Official

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

IfATE officials present: Rob Nitsch, Delivery Director (RN); Beth Chaudhary, Strategy Director (BC); Carmel Grant, Deputy Director, Commissioning and Development (CG); Nikki Christie, Deputy Director, Business Services (NC) (items 3-5); Simon Love, Head of Governance (SL); Martin Keeves, Co-lead of Funding Community of Practice (MK) (item 5 only); Governance Manager (Secretariat).

Other stakeholders present: Isabel Sutcliffe (IS), independent chair of the Assessment Panel (item 3 only).

Apologies: Jane Hadfield, board member.

### Item 1. Welcome, introductions and conflicts of interest

1. The Chair welcomed members and officials to the meeting. Jane Hadfield had given her apologies for absence which were accepted.
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.

### Item 3. Assessment Panel report

5. The Chair welcomed Isabel Sutcliffe (IS), the independent chair of the Assessment Panel (AP), to the meeting. IS provided an overview of the work of the AP since its last report to APAC in September 2023. During these six months the AP had focused on the APAC request that the AP review and highlight risks to the delivery of T Levels in particular.
6. In respect of the effective oversight of technical qualifications, the AP had conducted a deep dive into Quality Cycles and the development of the quality assurance (QA) model. The AP had commented on the first draft report examining the application of the QA model to review T Levels, carried out following the summer 2023 results.

7. The AP had been pleased to note that the first Level 3 qualifications would be proposed for approval in the near future and IS emphasised the importance of the assessment teams at IfATE continuing to share good practice.
8. The AP noted that IfATE had succeeded in closing gaps in the end-point assessment organisation (EPAO) market, thereby ensuring apprentices were able to take their end point assessments and complete their apprenticeship. The AP would continue to advise IfATE as possible alternative approaches emerge, and this would be relevant to more niche apprenticeships that might otherwise struggle to attract an EPAO.
9. The AP had discussed External Quality Assurance (EQA) transition and had considered IfATE's role as the EQA provider of last resort. IfATE had the full support of the AP in this regard and IS emphasised the importance of continuing to monitor and handle appropriately any potential or perceived conflicts of interest in this regard. IS noted the positive engagement that the AP had with the Office for Students (OfS) and Ofqual.
10. APAC members noted the importance of the AP's work and the advice it gave, and asked whether the AP had the resources and support needed to fulfil its work. IS confirmed that the AP had good support from IfATE officials and that it had sufficient resource to complete its work, but added that an additional member would provide a fresh perspective and increase resilience of the committee. RN and NC confirmed that IfATE was actively engaging in the recruitment of another member for the AP. IS commended the work done by IfATE officials in exceeding the target of 100 apprenticeship reviews by Christmas.
11. Members discussed the assessment-related risks presented in the paper and noted the importance of understanding the relevant mitigations in forming a balanced view of each risk. IS advised that each AP meeting considered a risk register that included mitigations in place and, confirmed that the AP would escalate risks where necessary to the relevant board committee, be that the successor to APAC or the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC).
12. Members asked whether the AP had formed a view on the quality and quantity of assessment within T Levels. IS confirmed that the AP had discussed the issue and had noted the difficulties with the scope of assessment experienced by some colleges providing multiple T Levels. The AP had concluded that there should be a level of comparability between the assessment regimes of T Levels and A Levels in order to prepare for the introduction of the Advanced British Standard.
13. The Chair thanked IS for her attendance and for the work that the AP did in providing independent assessment expertise to IfATE.

**Action 064: IfATE to recruit an additional member for AP to provide resilience and aid in succession planning by 1 May 24.**

**Action 065: AP to enact a standing agenda item that reviews assessment-related risks and mitigations at every meeting and to be reminded of the necessity to and escalate risks where appropriate to PAC or ARAC.**

#### **Item 4. EQA transition and performance**

14. NC introduced the item and provided APAC with an update of the actions undertaken since September 2023 with regard to EQA transition.

15. NC confirmed that, in future, apprenticeships will not be funded where there is no EPAO available to deliver the EPA unless there are exceptional circumstances. Apprentices will only be able to start on an apprenticeship if it has EPAO registered on the Apprenticeship Provider and Assessment Register (APAR). IfATE is leading a piece of work with Ofqual and DfE to streamline the applications to the APAR and reduce unnecessary delays to starts on new apprenticeships and new versions of apprenticeships. Developing a more sustainable EPAO model, where the apprenticeship portfolio is not constrained by EPAO availability, is a key component of the review of EPA to be undertaken in the Apprenticeship Innovation Project.
16. For some apprenticeships, Ofqual and the Office for Students (OfS) do not have the power to regulate the EPAO and there is no occupational regulator which is willing to oversee the EPA directly. IfATE is currently providing EQA for these apprenticeship standards and is exploring whether it could perform this function under a permanent arrangement. This would mean that IfATE is both delivering EQA and exercising oversight over the proper delivery of this function.
17. EQA as originally envisaged is not being delivered in its entirety because Ofqual and OfS are servicing only the regulatory components of EQA. To mitigate this, IfATE is working with Ofqual to create a process for obtaining the data they collect on apprenticeship assessment in order to allow IfATE to improve its EPA plans as well as understanding where risks lie. This enables IfATE to intervene on capability development, in particular. IfATE has also assumed responsibility for responding to EPA-related queries in order to underpin the smooth delivery of EPA.
18. Members noted the risks and commented that in some areas the risks seemed to be on an upward trajectory. Members felt raising the risk with ARAC at this time was premature and asked that a clearer expression of the risk was developed for their further consideration.

**Action 066: RN/NC to develop a clear exposition of the EQA risk for consideration by the AP and elevation as seen fit by AP.**

#### **Item 5. Apprenticeship innovation**

19. MK introduced the item and explained that, for some time, IfATE and DfE had discussed the prospect of reviewing elements of the apprenticeship programme. These informal discussions had coalesced into a jointly managed discovery project aimed at providing options to Ministers in Spring 2024 on how the apprenticeship system might be reformed.
20. The project had four main strands of exploration: end-point assessment (EPA); content of standards; stewardship of standards; and apprenticeship funding.
21. Members welcomed the exploration of a potential 'digital by default' approach to assessment, but noted that this might not be appropriate in all circumstances or for all learners. Members emphasised the importance of ensuring that any reforms to the apprenticeship system continued to put employers' needs first rather than focus mainly on cost-related reforms. Members also added that the value of a standard could not be expressed in simple numbers of apprenticeship starts and that consideration should be given to those occupations which provide comparatively few jobs but whose skills are nevertheless vital to the wider economy.

**Item 6. APAC annual report and APAC Chair’s statement for Annual Report and Accounts**

22. Members considered a draft report on APAC’s activities during the 2023-24 year, and approved the report for inclusion in the IfATE’s 2023-24 Annual Report and Accounts.
23. The Chair asked for her draft statement to be amended to clarify the activities described in the statement and to reflect APAC’s role in challenging officials and, promoting equity, diversity and inclusion.

**Action 068: RN to amend Chair’s Statement to Board to ensure challenge function mentioned, role in promoting EDI and ensure that bullets describing activities are suitably transparent.**

**Item 7. Any other business**

24. The Chair thanked members and officials for their participation in the final APAC meeting and for their contribution since the committee’s inception.

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