

Speech: Sally Collier Keynote Speech: FAB Conference 2017

Good morning everyone and thank you Stephen and thank you Paul for inviting me back. So back a year later, I was here a year ago; I am absolutely delighted to be back, a few more grey hairs and wrinkles, but as delighted to be back as I was to come here last year, only a few months after I'd taken up the job of course. So I'm now a year and a bit in, and when I stood here last year at Ofqual, we were anticipating the delivery of new general qualifications, new GCSEs, new 9 to 1 GCSEs, and also thinking about how Ofqual could play its role in the reform of vocational qualifications. I'm not going to focus on general qualifications today. I'm going to talk almost exclusively about vocational qualifications, particularly what we've been doing for the last year, and then set out what your expectations of us should be in the coming period. And then finish a bit about what our expectations of you are. Hopefully that will take about 20 minutes and some big hook will come and drag me off if I go on for longer than that.

So whilst I can't be here later, many of my colleagues are and we've got a stand and seminar, so please do go; if you got any questions, if you got any thoughts, please share those with us and I will be calling for that at various points during the next 20 minutes.

When I spoke to you last year I said that during my tenure at Ofqual, one of my expectations was that we would see increasing value with vocational qualifications and our role in it. That's certainly what we've been trying to do during the last 12 months, and one of the first things we've done is to get closer to industry. We have continually a rolling programme of engaging with industry. We have a conference on 21st November for industry, so any of the trailblazer groups, any of the employers that you are dealing with would like to be at that conference, please let us know and we will make sure they get an invite. There are a few places left. You know, of course, that the jobs at the end of this process are absolutely key to the starting point for designing qualifications and that's why we of course need to continue to engage with industry perhaps in a way that we haven't done before and haven't done as intensively before, and we'll be continuing to do that.

The next thing I want to talk about is our day-to-day regulatory activity, which now the balance is very heavily focused on the vocational side and you will be feeling the impact of that regulation. I hope in a way that supports you and supports the whole system to get better. We have received, triaged, acted on about 400 event notifications during the last year. That's broadly the same number as any other year you would expect in a landscape of this size. It's really important to know where the problems are and it's really important going forward for us to do even more of sharing those systemic issues, so immediately if we find a systemic issue, let's share that with you so that you can take that on board. It prevents other people falling in the same traps or doing the same things, and it helps the system as a whole, so you will be seeing more of that. We have audited 48 of you, many of

recipients of those audits will be in the room, thank you for your professionalism and your cooperation with those audits and I hope that you gain as much from those as we did. We've overseen five mergers and acquisitions, and when things go wrong we have commenced enforcement activity, whether that be asking for undertakings, signalling our intention to fine and actually fining in some cases. We've also really intensified our programme of technical evaluations of your products, moving from your processes to arrive at a quality product and the product itself, where of course Stephen mentioned validity; validity is at the heart of those products. Stephen also mentioned the fantastic Paul Newton, the work that he has produced today, he has an amazing talent to make the incredibly complex incredibly accessible, so please do go and pick up his report and talk to him during the conference. Also, we continue with our sector work. We've published a report from the security industry and took a range of regulatory actions as a result of that.

You can see that our focus has very much been on the vocational side. We've also done a lot to our supporting infrastructure. I'm not sure if Phil Beach would like me calling him supporting infrastructure, but we've recruited a new leader of the vocational team, we've brought in more resource, we've brought in more experienced resource in the sector, but of course building on our existing assessment expertise. That's given us a new clarity and focus of those responsibilities, and we've enhanced our IT system with the new portal, which I hope you're all finding more accessible and more efficient, and enables you to interact in a better way with us.

We've also of course launched consultations on new functional skills, so the current consultations – the DfE consultation on content and our consultation on the assessment approach are now live. Please respond, 22nd November is the end date there and we've made provision in our rules for an apprenticeship endpoint assessment. When I stood here last year we had agreed to regulate the endpoint assessment for 12 assessment standards. We have now looked at more than 80 and agreed to be the EQA and to regulate the endpoint assessments for 32. Those endpoint assessments range from level 2 to level 6, and they range from potentially quite small volumes like golf green keepers to customer services, where there are tens of thousands of potential apprentices, so really doing good work I think there. You, of course, and others will be the judge of that.

My message is that as the new landscape develops, as the reform programmes get underway, we want to work with you to make that a success. We all know that rushed qualifications with insufficient time for development, insufficient time for testing, and insufficient time for schools, colleges, training providers to get to grips with those qualifications rarely yield the best outcomes. And therefore the time that we have, we need to use well. The thing that I can control is what Ofqual does with how it takes up your time, so we must ensure that you are not confused, you are not seeking a greater understanding, you are not having to rework by anything that we do, and therefore I've launched a review of our communications and how we communicate with you. I want it to be as time efficient as possible, so please go and talk to my colleagues on our stand if you think we can do things in a

different way, do it better, or you like the things that we've been doing, so that we can really maximise the use of your time and our time. As I mentioned earlier, on things like event notifications, if we can immediately tell you about things that are perhaps not going as well or that you need to be warned of and that means that the system itself and that you can take action before I come anywhere near it, so I think that has to be a good thing. We have started on this approach. We post all our rules into a new electronic handbook. I hope you find them more accessible. Please give us some feedback on that. I have asked all my senior team to get out and talk to you in a non-regulatory fashion by looking at what it is like at the coalface, the issues that you're experiencing, things that we may think are completely benign, that may annoy you or may get in the way, some of those things we can quite easily fix, so thank you to those of you in the audience that have received us in recent weeks and months.

I also want to talk about rules and standards and the quality bar. I want to be very clear, the bar is not any different, for any different type of organisation. Whether you're an existing awarding organisation, an end point assessment organisation that wants to come in, the bar is no different. What we're doing is in the light of what I have just said about efficiency, about maximising use of time, about being clear is we're looking at that recognition process. For organisations who may not be familiar with this landscape, who need additional guidance, who need additional clarity, that will help everybody, both now and in the future, whether you want to provide an endpoint assessment or indeed another type of qualification. Yes, if you want Ofqual to be the external quality assurance organisation, then you have to be regulated by us, but the bar is the same. I also want to work with all the other organisations in this landscape, the Institute for Apprenticeships, the ESFA, to ensure that we maximise the sharing of data where we can. So that you don't have to provide the same data on multiple occasions for different uses. That is always tricky across government, but my intent is that we seek to do that.

Some rules simply won't apply to apprenticeships, and it is pointless keeping them in there if they are irrelevant or not necessary, so we will be consulting on our rules in terms of those which simply don't need to apply. We have already had a temporary suspension of the total qualification time. The other thing on apprenticeships is we are starting upfront evaluation of those EPAs in November, and our focus, as it should be, is on the validity of those EPAs. We are going to do that proportionately, consistently and, of course, by different risks and different sectors, because there will be different risks in different sectors. We also publish status updates on our website as to where all the EPAs that we're involved in, so you can see on a weekly basis where we are involved. And we're conscious of maintaining an aligned approach with all those players in the system, and we're working very closely with the IFA's quality alliance. And you can hear more about apprenticeships from Bryan Horne, my colleague; he is in the audience here this afternoon in the seminar.

I also want to talk briefly about functional skills. We will also be conducting upfront evaluation on functional skills, new qualifications before

they enter the market. We learnt a lot of lessons from upfront evaluation of qualifications, in general qualifications. It doesn't mean we are applying exactly the same accreditation approach, but it does mean that a lot of things were spotted, and if you get them upfront, it prevents many, many problems further down the line, so we will be looking to do that as efficiently as possible. And it is a careful balance on functional skills between maintaining those standards and keeping the real value of the flexibility of those qualifications and on-demand assessment and their real value for uses. Of course, we welcome your views on that approach in response to our consultation, and we will in due course run a technical consultation to follow up.

And to T levels – they will be a hugely important feature of the new landscape. We very much welcome the clarity provided by the government last week on some important features of T levels, and we very much look forward to playing our regulatory role in that landscape. Maybe when I am here next year, if you invite me back next year, we will have come a lot farther down the road on T levels.

So that is what you can expect from us. What do we need from you? We need you to do your day job as you do to an excellent standard. That is the big mother home apple pie, isn't it? That really is the best recipe for expansion for change, preparation for change. And as I – and I have gone around the country and certainly in recent weeks meeting not just FE providers, employers, independent training providers and awarding organisations, and I have been asking them: What do you think about the awarding bodies? What is good? What is not so good? They tell me where it is excellent, you are completely responsive. You have experts in their sector. You add value. You send reviewers that really add value and that spot things they couldn't have spotted for themselves. You issue accurate results and you certificate on time. It is a kind of fairly basic set of things, but when you do it well, you add enormous value. There are rare occasions where that is not the feedback. Where that is not the feedback, I want to let you know, because you can then do something about it, but I would hope that you know already, so you don't need me to tell you that. My plea for you is: How connected are you? Can you be more connected to your customers? How quickly are you getting that feedback and acting on it. Another obvious one is keeping close to employers. We are certainly intensifying our work in this area, and I know that that is what you have been doing during the last 12 months and, indeed, for many years, but we need to intensify that. I think the extent to which some of the job roles in some of these sectors are changing and will change and need to constantly kept up to date, I think, is a really important aspect that we all need to consider. And I want to thank you for your transparency in reporting to us when things might not have gone as well as they should have, or where they are at risk of not going as well as they should have. It is only if you do that, that we can do two things. One: we absolutely take that into consideration when we're working out why something has gone wrong and what you have done about it. But as important is that we can then use that to share with the rest of you and with the sector to say, how do we prevent it happening again somewhere else.

I want to conclude by just reflecting, and I am sure others will reflect during the course of the day on the profile that vocational qualifications, vocational programmes of study, have at the moment. It is probably unprecedented. Many of you have been around much longer than I have, but there is profile from the Prime Minister down, there is funding allocated, and I see this as an incredible opportunity, and we all know that well thought through, well designed, well managed qualifications, whether in their own right or whether as part of other programmes will bring greater coherence to this landscape, which I think is what we are all seeking, and will do what I said a year ago, which is raise the status of these qualifications. Good for me, good for you, good for employers, but most of all, really good for our learners.

Thank you very much.