

AAG Chair's End of Year Report 2021

From Ruth Jennings, Chair of the Apprenticeship Approvals Group (AAG).



The Apprenticeship Approvals Group – one year later

As Chair of the Apprenticeship Approvals Group, I am delighted to deliver my second annual report and reflect upon the progress we have achieved during this year. This comes following the transition and handover from the previous Modern Apprenticeship Group to a new system of governance which is employer-led, spanning across the whole apprenticeship family. This report for 2021 presents a unique opportunity to look back on our first full year of activity with AAG - now in implementation mode.

Adapting to the challenges of Covid-19

We had to respond quickly to the need for increased support for individuals and businesses within the work-based learning landscape. The global pandemic and impact of a complete shut down on many face-to-face interactions had the potential to derail progress towards fulfilling the objective – whole systemic change in the form of a new approach to apprenticeship development.

We were keen to continue the momentum and so we evolved our ways of working, embedding remote connections and maximising this in a fully inclusive and collaborative way. I am pleased to report that AAG monthly meetings have continued according to schedule by going online via Microsoft Teams, allowing the business-as-usual approval of apprenticeships to continue. Attendance at meetings has been excellent, with the omission of any travel and geographical considerations presenting a real opportunity to engage more readily with members.

The Covid pandemic also impacted on the delivery of Foundation Apprenticeships. With pupils unable to undertake employer placements, AAG agreed that a pragmatic and responsive approach was necessary and that this component could be adapted to allow a project-based element to be completed. AAG was asked to approve this approach to ensure that pupils were not disadvantaged by the pandemic.

Strong cross-functional inclusive membership

Our success is the result of our membership. We are delighted to include Bethany Walsh from Balfour Beatty: previous Apprentice of the Year, with experience of the apprenticeship system end-to-end and member of the SAAB Apprentice Engagement Group. We also welcomed a new representative from Education Scotland, Elizabeth McGuire, Senior Education Officer on Curriculum Leadership.

Maintaining strong stakeholder engagement has always been at the heart of what we do. Members have formed a strong two-way voice to support development and decisions. We have rolled out support to our suppliers involved in the development and review of existing frameworks to update them on the importance of the role of Fair Work and equality within apprenticeship frameworks through presentations by the Standards and Frameworks team at Skills Development Scotland (SDS).

Our collaborative approach was recognised recently by Jamie Hepburn, Minister for Higher Education, Further Education, Youth Employment and Training, when he attended an AAG meeting during Scottish Apprenticeship Week in March. The Minister's strong support for our work was clear and he explicitly remarked upon a diverse, well-represented membership as one of our key strengths.

AAG in Action

We've had an expected upsurge in activity for the group in the past year and there is lots to reflect upon and celebrate. We have:

- approved **18** new and updated apprenticeships
- approved adaptations to Foundation Apprenticeships due to Covid
- continued to support **6** further apprenticeships through the approval process
- approved the first apprenticeship developed via the new development process; Technical Project Management apprenticeship at SCQF Level 8

New employer-led system for apprenticeship development

Great strides have been made in the introduction to the apprenticeship development process of Technical Expert Groups (TEGs), Employee Workshops and wider, general consultation to help ensure apprenticeships are fit for purpose. The approvals process naturally sits at the end of the new development life cycle and it was important to be a moving part in the process without becoming a bottleneck to the system.

The Scottish apprenticeship system has always tried to put the success of learners at its heart and new apprenticeship development continues to do so while strengthening employer involvement at every stage of decision making.

Direction of travel for 2021-22

The aim is to continue working closely with the Standard and Frameworks team in SDS to support the review of the new frameworks that are produced by the new TEG approach. We will also revisit existing frameworks and assess and reformulate them through the new process. With over 13 apprenticeships timetabled for this year alone, plus in-year changes that require AAG approval, it will be no easy task, but one necessary to ensure we achieve a holistic and consistent outcome which works for all stakeholders across the skills landscape. It's a journey of collaboration, with SAAB Standards and Frameworks Group (SAAB SFG) providing leadership as the 'voice of industry' from employers across all sectors and sizes, demonstrating that all businesses can have a part to play.

AAG has shown a commitment to continuous improvement and we are keen to implement some of the recommendations following the work with British Standard Institute (BSI) around a development approach to quality outcomes. The BSI recommendations, to strengthen the new apprenticeship governance system and align it with good practice, have now been developed into an action plan which SDS are implementing. As part of this activity, AAG have identified improvements in the approach to governance with clarifications required within the Definition of Apprenticeship which are being progressed with SAAB SFG.

I look forward to seeing the work of the Approvals Group grow as it sits firmly at the heart of the new apprenticeship development process and I have great aspirations for us in achieving systemic change.



Ruth Jennings, Sainsburys

Chair of Apprenticeship Approvals Group

Member of Scottish Apprenticeship Advisory Board (SAAB) Standards and Frameworks Group