

PAAVQ-SET NATIONAL CONFERENCE 2008 - ANN RANDALL, CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Good morning everyone, friends new and old, welcome to our 2008 National Conference at the Belfry, I hope you're enjoying the facilities and the beautiful surroundings; perhaps some of you have had or will have the chance for a game of golf!?

This occasion gives me the opportunity to speak to you about what we've been doing since our last Conference and to applaud the success of our Centres and Candidates.

Yet again, this has been another outstanding year; we have reached two significant milestones - our 10,000 certificate issued and over 20,000 registered candidates! This has been achieved with the commitment from our Centres, Centre Co-ordinators, Internal Verifiers and Assessors; the PAAVQ-SET team; our External Verifiers and the staff at our Lichfield Office.

Another milestone was our acquisition of the Polymer and Signmaking Sectors' awarding body, SASL, on 4th July 2008. Since then our Lichfield Office Staff and External Verifiers have been working hard to integrate the SASL centres as seamlessly as possible into our centre community. I'd like to thank them all for their hard work to achieve this and to welcome the SASL centres that are attending this Conference today.

We believe this acquisition will provide the polymer and signmaking sector with a secure home for their qualifications. It will ensure greater stability for PAAVQ-SET in the future by expanding the diversity of our awards base. Particularly with the level of change that is approaching the world of education and learning; this will ensure that we stand firm on strong foundations providing protection for our portfolio of specialist qualifications, the centres and candidates who use them.

It was also a year of change for the Regulator who we welcome here today; in May QCA was formally replaced with Ofqual whose focus will be as an Independent Regulator for Qualifications, based in Coventry. We support their approach of light, intelligent regulation for the future; however we have concerns on how consistent quality will be managed with the 'open door' policy to encourage employers and training providers to become Awarding Organisations. We will work with the Regulators and you to ensure that our qualifications remain robust and valued by employers and learners.

John Skipworth of Ofqual is holding a workshop session today to discuss how to identify and advise on avoiding Malpractice. This will give a valuable insight to this area of concern and I'd like to thank him for offering to run this for our centres.

In August, Ofqual launched the new Regulatory Arrangements for the Qualification and Credit Framework (QCF); this was based on the outcomes of the Test and Trials that had been carried out over the last two years. We held a successful workshop at last year's conference illustrating the changes that would be coming.

We'll be returning to this again in the Reform of Qualifications workshop to discuss the outcomes of the Test and Trial Project that we jointly ran with Cogent SSC plus the successful outcome with the Solutia, the Centre that volunteered to deliver the new awards, Alan Gibbons of Solutia will tell you how this impacted on his organisation.

The success of that Test and Trial project was 24 Candidates receiving their Certificate in Emergency Response which is worth 23 credits.

These are the challenges for the new QCF Framework to encourage employers to accredit their in-house training via a regulated framework. PAAVQ-SET has been working with employers for many years accrediting their training programmes through our Specialised Awards. Those of you who have attended previous conferences will have experienced the value that organisations, such as GSK, Altro Floors and others have found taking that 'extra step' by opening their training to an external review from our experts. We would like to congratulate Altro Floors on achieving the Manufacturing Excellence Award for People Effectiveness!

We've actively been working with the Sector Skills Councils, Cogent, Skills for Logistics, Proskills, Skillfast-Uk and SEMTA to ensure that their qualifications are fit for purpose and meet the needs of our centres and candidates. I'd like to thank those centres that have been involved in helping to shape what the new qualifications should be like - the voice of the customer.

We've just submitted Apparel Product Development onto the QCF, joining our Certificate Awards to give candidates the opportunity to achieve these new qualifications and hopefully they will be used in the new 14-19 Diplomas as Additional/Specialised Learning - there will be more in 2009 further closing the link between academic and vocational qualifications.

It's a critical time with the development of new awards for the QCF that will replace the existing National Qualification Framework. We will be exploring these changes in more detail in the Reform of Qualifications Workshop and how the 'migration' to QCF as it is called will be completed.

We've continued to keep a watchful eye on our Qualification Portfolio which now contains over 100 qualifications. Looking at the future 2009 and onwards it will be busy particularly as the new replacement qualifications start to emerge ready to go onto the QCF. We are committed to ensuring that our centres have access to our current qualifications; NVQs, Vocational Qualifications and SVQs, all will have their last registration date extended to 31 December 2010.

We're progressively ensuring that all our awards will have this last registration date, so be rest assured that the existing qualifications will remain in place until that time. We are committed to providing qualifications for our specialised sectors unlike some awarding bodies who are taking the opportunity of this change to 'drop' niche awards.

We've also added some new qualifications to our Portfolio; Weighbridge Operations Level 2, the new Warehouse and Storage NVQs including Logistic Operations level 3 are now available. If there are any other awards that you feel are a useful addition please let us know and we will investigate the possibility of adding them. Our qualifications are used nationally across the four nations and internationally, in the Middle East, Africa and now in New Zealand - we're global!

We've also seen the emergence this year of National Skills Academies; it's their remit to raise the skills levels of their Sectors. PAAVQ-SET are working with two of the Academies, for the National Skills Academy for Nuclear (NSAN), we are launching a new Award in Nuclear Industry Awareness. This award has been mentioned by the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority as a key component of their Skills Strategy for the sector launched this month.

For the National Skills Academy for Processing Industries (NSAPI) we've been working with them on the Assessment System of Employer Training (ASET) to enable employers accredit their in-house training to National Qualifications providing access to funding initiatives. NSAPI are here today to talk about their ASET Project; this is a key objective of the Reform of Qualifications to enable this to take place.

Ensuring quality of assessment is the foundation of our Best Practice Workshops which continue to be popular and always sold out - we held an extra one this year in Birmingham and in Scotland to meet the demand. Our Best Practice Workshops allow our community of centres to explore the issues that are emerging in the quality assurance of qualifications, the popularity of these shows that our centres agree. New dates will be on the website shortly; in addition in the New Year we'll be holding a Best Practice Workshop focusing on Laundry and Dry Cleaning, again details will be on the website and sent out on our E-Bulletin. If there are any other areas you would like to be included please let us know.

Customer Service is always top of our priorities; this year we carried out our biennial Customer Satisfaction Survey and I can't thank those of you enough who took the time to complete it - we had an excellent response rate - 30% and the results were outstanding! We all get inundated with requests for feedback but we really want to know what you think about our service and products, so that we can improve how we work with you.

Our survey told us that 95% of you are happy with the service you receive from us, 94% were satisfied or very satisfied with our Registration and Certification Service, so again we continue to meet our Key Performance Indicators. 96% of respondents were pleased with the level of support received from us that is particularly evident when I see the comments given by Centres on the EV Visit Report Forms.

Of those who attended our Best Practice Workshops 92% found them extremely useful, recommendations like that are hard to come by. Again we welcome your feedback, through the EV Visits, via our Website - it's your opportunity to influence how we work with you.

Our first half of the year was taken up with Audits; in February we had visits from QCA, in March was SQA, April was our ISO Audit and finally our financial audit took place in May. So there weren't any areas of our operation that were not under some level of external scrutiny; I am delighted to say that we have yet again no non-compliances with our ISO audit. We've had a positive experience with our Regulators' and have taken on board the comments to improve our processes and procedures.

One area that will be more apparent to our Centres is the Risk Assessment that we do; we've re-evaluated our approach to this and made the experience more transparent so that our Centres are aware of issues that could cause some level of risk and how to manage them. The new Risk Assessment Guidance has just been circulated by email with the latest version of the Centre Portfolio; if you haven't received your copy please let Debbie or Angie know.

Our QCA and SQA Audit Reports will be available on their websites for public viewing when all their procedures have been completed, possibly by end of this year.

Improving the performance of organisations continues to be an important focus of both government and companies themselves, Business Improvement Techniques are seen as key to meeting that aspiration. Today we have Warwick International showing how this can be achieved and improving the bottom line. In addition we've Jonathan Ledger of Proskills showing how SSCs are using funding to enable companies to have access with the technical support to achieve those objectives. The Government has invested in a multi-million pound initiative through the SSCS to assist in an increase of performance and skills, Business Improvement Techniques provides the structure for the organisation and recognition for the learner to achieve that.

So what does the future hold for us, we have new qualifications, a new Qualification Framework, new ways of working together to get individual's skills accredited, to make companies more productive. Credit in this arena has a positive benefit by showing clearly how much a qualification is worth, for the first time giving comparability to skills and knowledge. The QCF will provide the opportunity and flexibility for employers to gain accreditation for their in-house training, a major objective of the Government and the Regulators.

We have always believed at PAAVQ-SET that qualifications and accreditation are cornerstones of the learning process, providing motivation for the individual and a qualified workforce for employers. It is our hope that the QCF will provide the key to ensure that drive for achievement to qualify training and encourage employers to certificate their workforce in a way that adds value to the business - a brave new world!

PAAVQ-SET is well placed to embrace this change unlike some awarding organisations, we will be there to support our centres and provide opportunities for our learners - we have the experience, commitment and resources to achieve this change.

So enjoy your day I look forward to talking to you; we hope that it answers to your questions and poses you more challenges!

Thank you.