

## Annual General Meeting 2006

NFEC's CEO William Devine and NFEC Chairman John Lockey kicked off the two-day Autumn National Conference at the Coventry Hilton with the NFEC agm. They could report twelve months of substantial progress that leave NFEC in a sound financial position. Members can view the full agm report at [www.nfec.org.uk](http://www.nfec.org.uk)

## The View from John Lockey



On business plan, marketing and finance  
we hit the ground running:  
NFEC chairman **John Lockey**

Your Autumn 2006 National Conference was very well received, delegates complimenting the professionalism of NFEC conference management, the quality of the speakers and the relevance of the conference programme.

Clearly, the investment in improving the twice-yearly conference is paying off, and these get-togethers are now established as a not-to-miss event. I am delighted with the feedback gleaned from delegates, exhibitors and speakers. We are evidently producing a conference that is of high quality.

Our thanks must go to NFEC's Conference Organiser, Bob Millington, who couples expertise in event-management with many years' experience as a conference customer, college senior manager and NFEC office-holder.

The challenge now is to maintain the standard of speakers and build upon the already-dynamic Q&A sessions.

We're working on the Spring list of speakers now. As for lively Q&A's, the way to maintain that is more members to attend, and for even more of them to ask the questions that put speakers on the spot.

This has been an excellent first year for our new CEO, William Devine. We have seen Billy drive forward a more-focussed marketing and business strategy, as well as rebranding NFEC. We are now seen for what we are: an organisation that represents employers as well as teachers and trainers – indeed, as a membership body unique in post-16 engineering and technology learning.



A Spring in their step: CEO **William Devine**, business development organiser **Hazeldene Williamson** and conference organiser/chairman **Bob Millington**

We can look forward to the future with confidence.

Couldn't make the Autumn 2006 conference? Then tell us on [www.nfec.org.uk](http://www.nfec.org.uk) What would tempt you out to May's Spring National Conference? If you were with us at Autumn Conference, is there anything you feel we missed and could cover in our Spring get-together? We'll keep you informed as we develop the conference programme, but while we're doing the developing, why not keep us informed of what you would like to see, hear and be a part of?

Meanwhile, fellow-members of NFEC, come and help us shape that future. I look forward to seeing you at the Spring National Conference on Thursday and Friday 24 and 25 May 2007 at the Hilton Hotel, East Midlands Airport. Let's make that another landmark conference.

There will plenty to report, of that I can assure you.

**John Lockey,**  
**Chairman, NFEC**

## CEO's Conference Overview



Many of the changes in the structure, funding, quality improvement and inspection of learning which have been forecast and debated at past conferences are now being implemented. NFEC is working to ensure implementation is 'fit for purpose'. It's a complex picture, covering new qualifications from the relatively-simple new PEO to the intricacies of Specialised Diplomas. Then there are structural changes, such as

- Launch of National Skills Academies
- Train to Gain
- Qualifications and Credit Framework
- Functional Skills
- Newer agencies established to improve teaching and learning

Conference topics are chosen from both delegates' requests at the previous events as well as from discussions between NFEC officers.

We emphasise to speakers that delegates come not just to listen but to present to those in positions of influence their experience from education and training's front line. This conference was no different, so read on.



NFEC conference return fixture? SEMTA's Sir Alan Jones

Our keynote speaker, SEMTA chairman and Chairman-Emeritus of Toyota UK, Sir Alan Jones, typified the lively and thought-provoking tone of the conference. Sir Alan so enjoyed the to-and-fro of debate with NFEC members that he has asked to be invited back to the Spring National Conference to report progress made with Skills Academies.

Sir Alan Jones led a powerful NSAM team whose members shared their a vision of a future in which 'joined-up' education and skills development enabling UK industry to retain its world-class position.

Sir Alan's team members went into considerable detail, eliciting plenty of feedback on what delegates thought NSAM should and should not be doing. NFEC has presented to NSAM a paper analysing delegate feedback based upon a questionnaire NSAM itself issues at conferences.

**The National Skills Academy Manufacturing turned out in force to give an account of themselves:**

from left to right Alan Glover - LSC West Midlands, Sir Alan Jones, Bill Twigg - Technical Director, SEMTA, Mark Rutherford – Director of Engineering Business at Rolls Royce, Billy Devine – NFEC EO, Bob Millington – NFEC Conference, David Cheetham - Principal of Gateshead College.



We want to know what NFEC makes of NSAM: **Mark Rutherford**, Director of Engineering Business, Rolls Royce



No, the Specialist diploma is not the one that got away: QCA Head of Skills **Teresa Bergin**

Specialised diploma work has moved on from specification stage to the point where awarding bodies are designing qualifications, and then on to the challenging aspects of delivery through quality-controlled partnerships using a 'gateway' model.

As with their HE equivalents in Foundation Degrees, the central challenge is to establish work-based learning placements of quality. There is a clear tension between DfES's ambitious expectations of expansion and the engineering community's insistence upon appropriate arrangements from the very start - including those for work placements which already compete with those which are part of the general KS4 requirement.

NFEC is well-placed to help shape implementation of the specialised diploma, and is a key member of the EDDP diploma 'delivery group'.



Going for Brokerage:  
LSC's **David Greer**

'Train to Gain' is likely to be the only way ahead for adult work-related learning; both brokers and providers must collaborate to add value. Brokers were encouraged to seek out and chase new business, particularly from the 'hard-to-reach' SME area.

Another concern of delegates echoed Sir Alan's point. This is that there is little point in certificating what people could do already, except as a motivation towards skills enhancement.

The current 'Level 2 target' could encourage such pointless activity.

There is some evidence, however, that LLSCs could support Level 3 in lieu. It's an issue which NFEC is vigorously pursuing.

Functional Skills are emerging from work led by QCA, and will replace the current Key Skills requirements in Frameworks and become a feature of Diplomas. At Levels 1 and 2, FS has to fit within the assessment framework of GCSE. The current Key Skills proxy and exemptions arrangements will cease. There is unlikely to be any immediate coverage of the three broader Key Skills.



Are Functional Skills the Key?  
QCA's **Jill Stokoe**



Time of Trial:  
QCA's **Nick Juba**

QCA is still working to implement what was once described as the 'Framework for Achievement' but is now known as the 'Qualifications and Credit Framework'. QCA is radically reviewing the qualification structure in England through the Qualification and Credit Framework. This review paves the way for the bite-size and flexible learning that employers want, and so will help assure the future of UK plc. Extensive pilots are under way, and it would be a mistake to think this QCA review merely a unitisation of existing courses. It is patently much more, and merits NFEC's continued attention.

Through Lifelong Learning UK, QCA is also developing a framework of qualifications for teachers, tutors, and trainers to improve the standard of learning delivery. 'Learning By Doing' lies at the heart of this initiative; the context and delivery of the learning matches employment and employer needs.

Delegates also heard of the resources available to support teaching and learning in FE through the Learning and Skills Network, and for 'HE in FE' from Ian Lindsay, a specialist adviser in the Engineering Subject Centre at Loughborough.

Although not in the programme, some time was made to consider questions raised by the Parliamentary Education and Skills Committee's Inquiries into the Sustainability of Higher Education, and on the Bologna Process. NFEC is making a full response to government on the HE in FE issue.

### Delegate Feedback



Dr Jon Gill – Bridgwater College

I am delighted with the amount and quality feedback gleaned from delegates, exhibitors and speakers. We are clearly producing the conference delegates want. For analysis of the conference feedback from delegates, [www.nfec.org.uk](http://www.nfec.org.uk)

## Q&A

The Q&A debates between speakers and the ‘floor’ was lively and so mutually-informative that these debates will remain a cornerstone of the Spring and future national conferences:

### NSAM

Delegates did not want NSAM to become partisan, benefiting companies at the expense of providers.

NSAM should not be so focused on ‘lead providers’ as to failed to offer a “Big Tent”, welcoming all sides into a co-operative community. Other questions concerned:

- Criteria for selection as ‘lead providers’
- Potential for tension between national skills academies and regional skills partnerships,
- Sustainability of NSAM funding once the pump -priming and initial enthusiasm has expired
- Risk of confusion should NSAM and an awarding body come to different conclusions about the approval of a provider centre
- The extent to which other engineering-community SSCs (Gogent, for example) are involved.

### Diplomas

Many delegates still had doubts about how ‘diplomas’ would operate in practice. The big challenge would be Gateways’ ‘No ten-day work placement – no diploma’ rule, especially as early pilots with small numbers would give a false sense of workability. Other diploma points raised:

- Should there be tax incentives for employers who provide work placements?
- The EEF-sponsored [www.safevisits.org.uk](http://www.safevisits.org.uk) web site could help to reassure people that organisational, workplace-safety and child-protection requirements are not as off-putting as they can seem
- Recognition of the technical content, whether against HE admission criteria or for APL against Framework Technical Certificate content
- Concern about the grading process, including compensation
- ‘Funding-tracking’
- Quality-management in multi-site partnership arrangements
- Appropriate teaching qualifications, particularly for working at KS4.

## Train to Gain

Most delegates are satisfied with what they heard about brokerages, but are concerned that most of the funding will be swallowed up in providing Level 2 certification for those already working at that level, thus adding little to the skill-level of the operatives or of 'UK plc'

- The concept of 'Level 3 Jumpers', accepted in the North East (and perhaps elsewhere) should be extended nationally. NFEC is lobbying to bring this about

## Qualifications

Besides the 'Diploma' issue, delegates signalled reservations about the transfer of 'Business Improvement Techniques' from Engineering into the Business Management. The transfer, they feel, has to be both presented and funded as true 'Engineering', especially if applied under T2G in the hardest-to-reach SMEs, which needed it most but culturally most-opposed to anything not seen as 'hard engineering'. To make the required impact requires adequate resourcing.

## Functional Skills



**Jill Stokoe,**  
Strategic Manager for  
Functional Skills QCA

NFEC representative on the SEMTA NTFSC, was asked to ensure that there would be no disadvantage when 'Functional Skills' replaces 'Key Skills' in Apprentices Frameworks.

## GOGENT

Need to monitor GOGENT's approval to develop its own Skills Academy, in case the result was fragmentation rather than the coherence argued for in the NMSA presentations.

## NFEC presents.....

A list of speakers, outline of speeches and speaker-presentations is available on the website at [www.nfec.org.uk](http://www.nfec.org.uk)

## Spring 2007 -The Main Event

**Just a reminder that your Spring National Conference is on Thursday and Friday 24 and 25 May 2007 at the Hilton Hotel, East Midlands Airport. Register now.**