

Chief Executive's Welcome

I am delighted to welcome you to the Association's 34th Annual Conference – the first to be held online.

We all know the reasons we are unable to meet in-person. But we were determined not to let Covid-19 beat us, particularly as we face, once again, a particularly testing time planning for May.

2020 simply reinforced my admiration of all AEA members. It truly is an honour to represent such a special group of people, individuals who always demonstrate unwavering commitment and professionalism in the face of extreme pressure. Simply remarkable.

Conference promises once again to be interesting, useful, challenging and thought provoking.

It will feel different. It won't be quite the same. We may not be able to share stories or provide and receive reassurance as we might normally have done. We'll be unable to celebrate our successes in quite the manner we would like.

But the core content of Conference, the quality of the plenaries and workshops, the timeliness of the information, the sharing of good practice – well, none of that will change, all will remain undiminished.

I must thank everyone who has made it possible: the AEA's staff for their determination to put this event on; the team at Sunderland for their back-office support; Sparq for providing the online platform and helpful advice throughout; and every one of our guest speakers for taking time out to share their experiences and wisdom. Special mention must go to the workshop trainers, who have had to think outside the box in order to deliver their informative sessions.

Thanks are due to our commercial colleagues, who are once again extending invaluable support. Please take time to visit them in the virtual exhibition. Let's not forget that they too have lived the uncertainty of the last 12 months and faced their own challenges.

My final set of thanks and appreciation goes to all the branch officers, the AEA Board members and in particular our elected officers Glynne Morgan, Alex Mammous and Rob Curtis, who have committed so much of their own time over the last year, providing support, challenge and a sense of realism to all that we do.

The AEA is a special organisation because of its members, individuals who have extremely high professional standards and are selfless in their

determination to deliver. I am proud that the core strength of the AEA has once again helped see us through the last year, with a colleague, a peer, a friend never more than a phone call away.

Enjoy Conference 2021!

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