

In confidence

BCB(12)1st meeting

Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> April 2012

## **MINUTES**

### **Present**

Vernon Ellis                      Chair  
Nihal Arthanayake  
Martin Bean  
Simon Fraser  
Pamela Gillies  
Tony Hall  
Claire Ighodaro  
Howell James  
Steve Jones

### **In attendance**

Jo Beall, Director Education & Society  
Pippa Greenslade, Director Global HR  
Adrian Greer, Director Global Network  
Mark Robson, Director English  
Bidesh Sarkar, Chief Financial Officer  
Graham Sheffield, Director Arts  
Rebecca Walton, Director Partnerships & Business Development  
John Worne, Director Corporate HQ  
Michael Carrier, Director English Language Innovation (item 3)  
Anna Searle, Head of Teaching Operations (item 3)  
Harriet Green, Director Digital (item 4)  
Myra Hunt, Director Digital (item 4)  
Andy Mackay, Secretary

### **1. Apologies for absence & declarations of interest**

James Boyle, Alan Buckle, Sue Hoyle, Patrick McKenna and Raoul Shah had sent apologies for their absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

### **2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 21<sup>st</sup> February 2012 and matters arising**

All matters arising from the meeting were being actioned, were included in the agenda for this meeting, or were scheduled for a future meeting.

Martin Davidson and Pippa Greenslade reported on the smooth handover of the Chevening scholarship programme to the Association of Commonwealth Universities, which had taken place at the end of March. The loss report was being prepared and would be circulated to Trustees in due course.

Trustees agreed that they would appreciate an update report on the development of the Microsoft partnership, either at the next meeting or in writing before then.

They also agreed that it would be useful to receive more information about the individuals who were being invited to join the Arts Advisory Group.

The minutes were approved.

### **3. English Strategy**

The Board endorsed the strategy presented for the achievement of the 2015 corporate plan targets for English. They welcomed the focus on the impact which the work could deliver, whether through paid or unpaid services, and agreed that it was important to explain how fee paying services were a core part of the impact which the organisation delivered for the UK and were integral to building relationships and developing trust.

They agreed that a priority was to achieve synergies between the different modes of delivery described, and particularly to achieve a blended approach to language teaching, integrating face to face and digital channels in the most effective way.

*\*Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is "likely to prejudice the commercial interests" of either the British Council or another party, as it is defined in Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000".*

The Board agreed that the strategy was appropriately ambitious and prudent to deliver the targets for 2015. They welcomed the possibility of discussing longer term ambition for work in English, beyond the time frame of 2015, later in the year. *\*Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is "likely to prejudice the commercial interests" of either the British Council or another party, as it is defined in Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000"*

### **4. Digital Strategy**

The Board commended the digital team for the progress which had been made in designing and building the platform and infrastructure for the effective delivery of digital content and services. They were keen to understand whether the rollout process was sufficiently ambitious and rapid. They appreciated that the rollout was not simply about delivering a technology or tools but was rather about integrating the digital offer into the mainstream business of the organisation and that this would require some time to effect. It was also critical that the changes made should be sustainable beyond the life of the development project.

At the next opportunity to discuss the development of the digital offer, the Trustees wished to learn more about the development of the digital products which would be delivered through the infrastructure which was being rolled out. They were also interested in the development of the guidelines to achieve coherence in brand experience and in the ownership of the road map for digital content. They agreed that it would be important that this should not be held centrally but that coordination and leadership were strong and consistent across the sectors and teams. In the strategic business units suitably skilled experts were being recruited to lead the process of embedding content development as a core part of any project.

The Board agreed that it had been totally appropriate to focus on platform stabilisation and development as the first building block for a more ambitious digital strategy. The priorities in the next stage would be achieving the right tone and presence in the digital arena; development of new and exciting content; the integration of digital with the whole organisational offer; and the implementation of effective and efficient transactional services for customers. This would all need to happen in parallel for best effect, which would require strong programme management and would be challenging

for the different parts of the organisation as they would need to reconfigure at pace. It would also lead to decisions as to the extent to which the brand could be stretched to meet local customer needs at the same time as protecting the overall brand positioning.

Trustees were confident that the skills base had been significantly enhanced with the building of the digital team over the past year. They would be interested to learn of the success of developing skills at sector and programme level in the next phase, and of the transfer of ownership from the project to the business.

Overall, they were pleased and impressed with progress and looked forward to the next update in due course.

## 5. Chair's business

The Chair updated Trustees on the report about the British Council's Annual Report of the Foreign Affairs Committee which had been published the previous week. The report was broadly positive but stressed that the British Council must maintain the correct balance between its revenue generating work and its priority to deliver impact for the UK. Trustees agreed that it was important to build understanding for the way in which the revenue earning activity was an important component of the British Council's impact for the UK and that the current balance was appropriate. *\*Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is "likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs as defined in Section 36 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000"*.

He also reported on the proposed World Capital of Cultures project on which he had briefed the Board at a previous meeting. It had been agreed that it would be too ambitious to attempt to launch in 2015 with London as capital of culture and that the emerging concept was to work with appropriate G20 partners, particularly the French and the Germans, to support the development of capitals of culture outside Europe, from 2017 onwards. The European partners would contribute expertise and experience to support the cities identified.

Trustees endorsed the new idea generation group which the Chair was setting up and agreed that it would be useful to share the terms of reference for the group, as they were developed, to ensure that it contributed in the best way to the effectiveness of the organisation.

Trustees reported on recent visits they had made to British Council operations overseas:

- Pamela Gillies had visited Portugal for an innovation planning meeting with Country Directors from the EU region. She reported that the meeting had been very successful, with excellent idea generation and enthusiasm and energy for delivery.
- Pamela Gillies and Steve Jones had attended a meeting in Paris on the implementation of the Board turbo project to develop the model of operations in Europe. They had identified major opportunities for the British Council, particularly in English language programmes and were keen that the team in France should be encouraged to be ambitious and to continue to build momentum to exploit them. The Board discussed the current estate arrangements in Paris, where the British Council co-owned an excellent building with the University of London and ways in which that could be developed in future, particularly depending on the plans which the University of London might have for their presence in France.
- Howell James had made a brief visit to the British Council in South Africa. He had noted with interest the focus on the development of the examinations business and looked forward to learning more of the work there on a future visit.
- Martin Bean had recently visited the operations in Australia, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia. He had been impressed by the focussed work in the arts in Australia, by the effectiveness of the working relationship with the FCO and UKTI in Japan and by the reputation and influence which the British Council enjoyed in Malaysia for its work in building relationships and collaboration in higher education.

- Simon Fraser had visited the British Council in Mexico and reported on the significant opportunities for work there in teacher training through a pilot project which was being run there.
- Tony Hall had travelled to Abu Dhabi for the Abu Dhabi Festival and had been pleased to experience that the British Council was not only building UK participation in the festival but also working on arts education and technical skills development. The Board agreed that this presented major opportunities for the British Council and were impressed by a recent project which the British Council had organised in collaboration with the Royal Opera House and Thurrock College to provide skills development for forty Chinese stage managers, both in Beijing and London. Initiatives such as this, and other projects, such as the potential development of a Dubai Opera House, offered real potential for the British Council.

## 6. Chief Executive's Report

Martin Davidson briefed Trustees on the successful conclusion to negotiations with DfID for a contract for the development in partnership of a new schools' project. The negotiations had allowed the British Council to identify the most efficient and effective ways to harmonise its previous schools' work and to make one, coherent offer, with huge potential for making a difference at scale using digital channels. DfID were extremely committed to the project and had made a significant financial commitment, which would be matched by the British Council.

He reported on the British Council's partnership with the London Book Fair. The focus country for the festival this year was China, and there was a delegation of between one and two thousand Chinese who were currently in London. The British Council's role in sponsoring the participation of Chinese writers who were approved by the Chinese government had attracted significant media coverage, both positive and negative. He stressed that the British Council's position remained that it was better to seek to engage with other countries and governments in order to build relationships and the potential for change and not to seek to isolate governments with whose policies the UK was not in agreement. *\* Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is "likely to prejudice international relations" as defined in Section 27 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.* The London Book Fair was one of a series of engagements with China, and in other interventions, voice had been and would continue to be given to dissident and exiled artists.

The London Book Fair had also coincided with the People to People Dialogue with China which had allowed for lengthy discussion of cultural exchanges. During the visit, he had signed agreements on behalf of the British Council including for the teaching of Chinese in the UK; for scholarships for British students to study in China and for the development of support for technical learning for theatre in China.

The Board was updated on the security situation in Afghanistan following the recent attacks. All staff were safe and the security measures had proved effective. Attention had now turned to caring for staff and ensuring that they were given the support they needed following the experience.

## 7. Organisational Performance Report

The Board noted the preliminary results for the year 2011/12 and commended the leadership team for the financial performance achieved. They discussed the slippage in the investment programme and were reassured to learn that it would return to schedule in 2012/13 and that there would be no significant impact on achievement of financial targets for the remainder of the corporate plan period. They welcomed the addition of the measures related to the people strategy, which had been discussed and agreed at a previous meeting.

## 8. Staff Survey

The Board congratulated management throughout the organisation on the significant improvement in the majority of scores and were very encouraged by this positive trend. They endorsed the approach

to identifying and implementing effective follow up to areas where further improvement was necessary and agreed that the move to a survey every two years, with pulse surveys between, would allow sufficient time for the result of action taken to show through in the results.

## 9. Annual Report

Trustees were updated on the development of the Annual Report, which was progressing in line with the very tight schedule for the current year. They approved unanimously the delegation of authority to the Chair and the Chief Executive to sign the annual report and accounts when prepared.

They agreed that they would welcome Trustee engagement with the next stages of development of the report. Howell James agreed to be a member of the steering group and the Board agreed that Sue Hoyle and Raoul Shah should be invited to be the other Trustees to join the group.

## 10. Any other business

Trustees endorsed and unanimously approved the premises investment strategy which had been circulated electronically for consideration, as they had agreed at the last meeting. They delegated authority to the Chief Executive to authorise the investment proposed.

The Chair drew the attention of Trustees to the draft terms of reference for the Education Advisory Group and the Society Advisory Group and invited them to make any comments on the terms of reference or suggestions of suitable candidates to join either of the groups to Andy Mackay.

There was no other business and the meeting closed at 1215.

## Summary of action points arising

### Meeting of 11 October 2011

(05)9	July 2012 agenda to include item on operation of subsidiary entities
(05)10	July 2012 agenda to include item on Central Bureau Pension scheme

### Meeting of 21 February 2012

(01)3	Finance & Contracts Committee to review corporate plan investment schedule
(01)5	Brief paper on organisational learning from unsuccessful full cost recovery contract tender to be prepared for Trustees

### Current Meeting

(02)1	Rebecca Walton to update Trustees on Microsoft partnership as appropriate
(02)2	Graham Sheffield to provide more information about the Arts Advisory Group.
(02)3	Board awayday in September to include discussion of long term ambitions for English
(02)4	Mark Robson to report on <i>*Information in this section has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is "likely to prejudice the commercial interests" of either the British Council or another party, as it is defined in Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000*</i>
(02)5	Trustees to receive terms of reference for the ideas generation group once drafted.
(02)6	Annual Report team to make contact with Trustee steering group.
(02)7	Trustees to send comments on terms of reference for Education and Society Advisory groups to Andy Mackay

*\* Enquiries regarding the redacted information contained in this document should be directed to the Information Policy Advisor: Freedom of Information, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN or via email, [foi@britishcouncil.org](mailto:foi@britishcouncil.org).*