

In confidence

BCB(14)6th meeting

Tuesday 2 December 2014

MINUTES

Present

Vernon Ellis Chair
Martin Bean
Janet Beer
Aled Eirug
Richard Gillingwater
Rohan Gunatillake
Howell James
Kirsty Lang
Usha Prashar
Martin Roth
Matthew Rycroft
Tom Thomson
David Verey

In attendance

Martin Davidson, Chief Executive
Jo Beall, Director Education & Society
Adrian Greer, Chief Operating Officer
Helen Murley, Director HR
Mark Robson, Director English
Graham Sheffield, Director Arts
Caroline Stockmann, Chief Financial Officer
Rebecca Walton, Director Partnerships & Business Development
John Worne, Director Strategy and Communications
Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive designate (items 7-11)
[REDACTED] EY (item 7)
[REDACTED], EY (item 7)
[REDACTED] EY (item 7)
John Dubber, Head External Relations (item 7)
[REDACTED], Consultant, Bates Wells and Braithwaite (item 8)
Alison Coutts, Secretary

Information in the section above has been redacted/removed as it is likely to be exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it contains "personal data" as defined in Section 40(2) (Personal Information) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

1. Apologies for absence & declarations of interest

Gareth Bullock and Ros Marshall had sent apologies for their absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed David Verey to his first Board meeting.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 2 December 2014 and matters arising

All matters arising from the meeting had been actioned or were scheduled for a future meeting.

The Minutes were approved.

3. Chief Operating Officer's Report

Adrian gave an update on financial performance and the plans in place to mitigate against a reduction in forecast end of year reserves. These include reducing grant spend, bringing business performance closer to plan, cutting the contingency fund for investment and re-prioritising the change programme. The latter will need to be reviewed again in the new year in the light of the outcomes of the Ernst & Young report following the Triennial Review, to ensure we remain focussed on the top priorities.

Adrian informed Trustees that following the attack on a British Embassy vehicle in Afghanistan, non-essential visits have been cancelled until further notice and we are working closely with the FCO on ensuring appropriate security arrangements.

The Chair flagged that the eHR programme has been halted. He noted that it is good that the organisation didn't continue with something that was not working well, but it is important to share lessons learned. Helen will bring these to the Board at the next meeting.

4. Chief Executive's Report

Martin referred to the British Council Annual Lecture which Baroness Ashton had delivered on 25 November. Several Trustees had attended and agreed that it had been impressive with an engaged audience.

The Board thanked Martin for an amazing 31 years of service including 7 years as CEO.

5. Chair's business

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He informed the Board that the organisation has done some good work on formalising stage gates and criteria for making decisions when pursuing and bidding for contracts which is being further developed. The criteria are also in line with recommendations from the Triennial Review such as being clear about the relevance to the UK and to working with partners.

He asked for feedback from Trustees who had travelled on behalf of the British Council recently. Usha and Kirsty reported back on the Hammamet conference. Kirsty had also visited the office in Cairo. Tom had visited Cambodia and met the Ambassador during his visit. The latter had encouraged the British Council to think about developing an English teaching programme in Cambodia as he felt there is market potential. Aled reported back on his visit to New York.

6. Corporate Plan 2015

John presented the structure and headline content for the next Corporate Plan. He explained the process for stakeholder consultation which has begun, will continue through January and will help shape the content. This will bring greater openness and transparency around decision-making and increase alignment with HMG. He set out the framing in terms of UK priorities, global trends and our place as the UK's international cultural relations organisation.

The Board agreed that it is important to have a core offer which people can expect wherever we operate. Behind this there will be tailored services for customers and institutions and businesses in some markets in some areas. They agreed in principle with the organisation's ambition to continue to grow. They discussed the economic model including the impact of an increasing percentage of the grant being categorised as ODA. They asked for more analysis of the economic model and of the impact of various funding scenarios. It was agreed that this would come to the Board as part of the session on economic modelling in the first half of next year.

Overall Trustees approved the approach.

7. Triennial Review

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8. Board Effectiveness Review

The Chair welcomed [REDACTED] to the meeting.

[REDACTED] gave a short summary of the issues she'd explored and her recommendations. She noted that the starting point is extremely positive and that her overall view is that it is a very strong and engaged Board. She observed that key strengths include the range of relevant skills and experience, the strong leadership and the work of the committees.

Trustees appreciated that there were a range of views on certain issues which were sometimes contradictory but overall there are some useful challenges. After a discussion on ideas for addressing some of the issues, it was agreed that the Secretariat will take note of the suggestions and turn the recommendations into a proposed action plan. This will come back to the Board for discussion in March, after Ciarán has also had time to take a view.

The Trustees thanked [REDACTED] for a helpful and well laid-out report.

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9. Updated delegated authorities from the Board to CEO

Caroline presented the updated delegations from the Board to the new Chief Executive and the transfer of delegations for banking to the new Chief Executive. The Board approved.

10. British Council Benevolent Fund – annual report and accounts

Helen presented the Annual Report and Accounts for 2013/14. The Board approved.

11. Any other business

The Chair noted that this was Martin Bean's and Richard Gillingwater's last meeting. He thanked them on behalf of all Trustees and the Executive for their commitment and contributions to the organisation over the last few years and wished them well for the future.

As the schedule had not allowed appropriate time for the agenda items on partnerships and digital, these should come to a later Board.

There was no other business and the meeting ended at 1400.

Summary of action points arising

Updated from previous meetings

(05)7	Report on Europe to come back to the Board addressing the offer, communications, capability and risk	2015
(01)4	Bring economic modelling for review	2015
(01)4	IT strategy including cyber-security to be scheduled for a meeting	2014/15
(03)3	Include a session on headcount and what good looks like	2015
(03)4	Include a session on EO&D targets, particularly on race	2015
(03)9	Include a focus on how we work cooperatively and in partnership with the UK sector in the next arts session	2015

Current meeting

(06)1	Include lessons learned from the cancelled EHR programme	February 2015
(06)9	Develop action plan from Effectiveness Review recommendations and bring back to the Board	March 2015