

In confidence

BCB(11) 4th meeting

Tuesday 12 July 2011

MINUTES

Present

Vernon Ellis Chair
Nihal Arthanayake
Martin Bean
James Boyle
Pamela Gillies
Sue Hoyle
Claire Ighodaro
Howell James
Patrick McKenna
Raoul Shah

In attendance

Martin Davidson, Chief Executive
Jo Beall, Director Education & Society
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
Myra Hunt & Harriet Green, Director Digital (item 5)
Paul Docherty, Director 2012 (item 8)
Andy Mackay, Secretary

1. Apologies for absence

Alan Buckle, Tony Hall and Steve Jones had sent apologies for their absence. From the executive, Pippa Greenslade had also sent apologies for her absence.

The Chair welcomed Martin Bean and Jo Beall, who were attending their first meeting as a full Trustee and Director Education & Society respectively.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of June 2011 and matters arising

All matters arising from the meeting were being actioned or were included in the agenda for this meeting, with the exception of item 7 from the meeting of 20 April 2010, which would be covered in the agenda for the December meeting. Item 4 from the previous meeting had been delayed because of scheduling difficulties. Items 5 and 6 would be considered at the forthcoming Board awayday.

The minutes were approved.

3. Chair's business

The members of the executive and the trustees proposed for re-election below were absent from the meeting for consideration of this item of Chair's business.

As previously indicated to Trustees, the Chair had proposed four Trustees for re-election for a second term of three years: Pamela Gilles; Tony Hall; Sue Hoyle; and Raoul Shah. All four had indicated their willingness to stand for re-election and the nominations had been seconded by James Boyle. Each was duly elected unanimously by those Trustees eligible to vote in this matter, for a period of three years from 16 September 2011.

The Chair drew the attention of the Trustees to the approval which had been granted in the Privy Council on 8 June 2011 to the changes which they had agreed to propose to the Royal Charter. He particularly drew their attention to the additional charitable purpose; the change in membership arrangements; and the addition of a section on conflicts of interest concerning Trustees, the latter to bring the British Council into line with best practice. He informed Trustees that he would henceforth ask Trustees for a declaration of interest in any one or more agenda items at the beginning of future meetings.

Trustees agreed that the new category of honorary membership should be considered at the same time as their review of the Advisory Group structure at their meeting in December.

The Board endorsed the proposed structure and content for the agenda for their September awayday meeting.

4. Chief Executive's Report

Martin Davidson briefed Trustees on the unveiling of the statue of Yuri Gagarin which would take place the same week as the Board meeting. A gift from the Russian space agency, the project was attracting significant media attention, with very positive coverage focusing on the role which cultural relations could play in widening and building relationships in contexts where the political relationship was more challenging.

Trustees discussed the response of the British Council to recent events in the Middle East and North Africa and agreed that the forthcoming meeting between the Chair and the Foreign Secretary offered an excellent opportunity to discuss our work in the region and its impact.

5. Digital Development

The Board endorsed the clear and comprehensive approach being taken to building a successful digital business. They recognised the ongoing work to restructure and align the existing systems and platform work as a springboard for further developments which would allow the British Council to become a leader in digital cultural relations. *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*.*

They agreed that it was hugely important to achieve presence which was uniform, consistent and accessible and then to focus on building content. There were significant challenges remaining to embed digital in the work of the British Council, both in terms of organisational culture and language. However, they noted that significant progress had been made over the last year and that the project had achieved a genuinely global approach to working, with recognition of the factors and necessary steps for the project to be successful. They were also keen to learn more about the development of capacity and capability in the organisation to deliver the challenging targets set.

In the next stage, it would be critically important to continue to engage all staff in digital development, to focus in the first instance on a small number of key projects and markets and to demonstrate the benefits which digital could deliver. Once this had been achieved, the focus should move to a single, integrated and simple approach, with primacy being given to brand, content, communication and distribution. The importance of the digital brand could not be understated and the British Council already enjoyed a strong position on which to build. *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**. There were huge opportunities to address the digital divide which were already being explored by the British Council through programmes such as Connecting Classrooms.

6. Arts Portfolio

The Board welcomed Graham Sheffield's report on his priorities for the arts portfolio and in particular his focus on staffing, programme and the process for development and delivery of work in the arts. They agreed with his assessment that there had been a number of recent success stories in the arts and that the reenergised team had built effective content. In the next phase, it would be important to articulate a clearer and more powerful narrative of the overall benefits of our work in this area, and to continue to rebuild relationships with the sector to demonstrate the value and importance for them of the work of the British Council in the arts. This would underline the importance of the UK's excellence in the arts as a key way of achieving cultural relations' benefits.

Trustees agreed the importance of developing the organisational capacity to build and protect intellectual property and to create more effective archives to increase the footprint and longer term impact of our work. A strong digital archive would also be very helpful in building brand awareness and recognition of the British Council.

For their consideration in February 2012 of the more detailed arts strategy, Trustees agreed that they would consider the narrative for work in the arts and for the impact which it delivered.

7. Partnership Strategy

Rebecca Walton explained the process for the development of the strategy for work in partnership which the Board would consider in October. The strategy would focus on building the scale and quality of programmes through new ways of working with partners. This should become the standard approach for the organisation and would result in a larger, partnership driven programme with a strong future pipeline. The approach would help to develop new income sources, but this was not the primary strategic goal.

Trustees agreed that the approach was appropriate and underlined the importance of maintaining a distinction between work to increase sponsorship and work to develop partnership. They felt it would be of critical importance to put in place a clear set of parameters to guide the best strategic decision making in the choice of partners. They also encouraged a strong focus on the impact of certain kinds of partnership on the visibility, use and reputation of the British Council brand as well as the potential impact of a substantial loss of Britishness in programmes.

They recognised and endorsed the value of the British Council's role as a thought and knowledge leader on how to deploy programme content for maximum cultural relations' benefit internationally. An excellent example of this was the International Inspiration Programme, developed in partnership with organisations such as UNICEF and Premier League, which had grown out of an earlier British Council sport programme.

Trustees offered their expertise and experience in this area to assist development of the strategy, in particular in aspects of brand and in building maximum leverage and amplification through partnership working.

8. British Council 2012 Programme

The Board welcomed and endorsed the work which was underway related to key events in 2012, including the Olympic Games, the Golden Jubilee of HM Queen Elizabeth II, the Patron of the British Council, and the Dickens bicentenary. They were particularly pleased to hear the connection that was being built between these programmes and the Derry/Londonderry city of culture 2013 and the 2014 Commonwealth Games in Glasgow.

9. Organisational Performance Report

The Board noted the data contained in the organisational performance report covering the period to the end of May 2011. They agreed that it was still very early in the year and that they would welcome a substantive discussion, based on more detailed analysis and commentary on the performance to date, at the meeting in October.

10. Annual Report from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the Annual Report from the Audit Committee and recorded their thanks to the Chair and members of the Committee for their continuing commitment and diligence in their contribution to the work of this committee.

11. Justice Sector Development Programme: Sierra Leone

The Board noted that the request was for delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to sign this contract. The contract related to a project which was ongoing and which had previously been approved by the Board. There was no material change to the contract value but a number of small changes to budget lines and to the project timeline. The Board unanimously approved the proposed delegation.

12. Any other business

The Board noted the dates of meetings for 2012.

The Board approved delegation of authority to the Chief Executive to sign a contract with DfID totalling £22.93m for a project to strengthen civil society in Afghanistan. They agreed that they would welcome the opportunity to discuss in more detail the full cost recovery contract dimension of the work of the British Council at a future meeting.

There was no further business and the meeting concluded at 1310. The meeting was followed by the British Council Annual General Meeting

Summary of action points arising

Meeting of 20 April 2010

(02)7	Board agenda for December 2011 to include an item on sector advisory groups following agreement of long term strategy
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Meeting of 7 June 2011

(03)4	Pippa Greenslade to coordinate with Sue Hoyle and Nihal Arthanayake on follow up to staff survey
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Current meeting

(04)1	Declarations of interest to be made under Chair's business at future meetings.
(04)2	Sector advisory group agenda item for December 2011 to include consideration of Honorary membership
(04)3	Chair to report at next meeting on his annual meeting with the Foreign Secretary
(04)4	February 2012 discussion of arts strategy to include narrative for work in the arts
(04)5	Trustees to work with Rebecca Walton on development of the partnership strategy
(04)6	October meeting to include discussion of performance in the year to date
(04)7	October meeting to include initial discussion of strategy for full cost recovery work

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** Enquiries regarding the redacted information contained within this document should be directed to the Freedom of Information Officer, British Council, 10 Spring Gardens, London SW1A 2BN (foi@britishcouncil.org)*