

In confidence

BCB(15)2nd meeting

Tuesday 24 March 2015

MINUTES

Present

Vernon Ellis Chair
Janet Beer
Gareth Bullock
Rohan Gunatillake
Rosemary Kelly
Usha Prashar
Martin Roth
Matthew Rycroft
Tom Thomson
David Verey

In attendance

Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive
Jo Beall, Director Education & Society
Adrian Greer, Chief Operating Officer
Helen Murley, Director HR
Mark Robson, Director English
Caroline Stockmann, Chief Finance Officer
Rebecca Walton, Director Partnerships & Business Development
John Worne, Director Strategy and Communications
Harriet Green, Director Digital (item 5)
Rosemary Hilhorst, Regional Director EU Europe (item 5)
Adrian Chadwick, Regional Director Middle East and North Africa (item 6)
Kate Ewart-Biggs, Director Global Network (item 6)
Alison Coutts, Secretary

1. Apologies for absence & declarations of interest

Howell James, Kirsty Lang and Ros Marshall had sent apologies for their absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair noted that it was Matthew Rycroft's last meeting. He recorded the Board's thanks to Matthew for his commitment and valuable contribution over his term.

Whilst Usha was out of the room, Trustees unanimously elected Usha Prashar as Deputy Chair for a second term subject to approval from the Foreign Secretary. Proposer: Vernon Ellis, Seconder: Gareth Bullock.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 10 February 2015 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 Executive's Report

Ciarán updated Trustees on the work the Executive Board has been doing on prioritising investments. They have set principles which will ensure we do not over-programme, for example rolling out some programmes of work in specific regions or countries rather than everything everywhere, and putting each investment through a gating process to enable a phased approach. He referred to calls he's been holding with senior managers around the network, during which a recurring theme has been the pressure on staff from the number of active change programmes. The new approach should help to alleviate this.

He mentioned his recent visit to Peru, Chile and Colombia and particularly the strong relationships in those countries between British Council offices and the Embassies.

He also updated Trustees on the various meetings he continues to have with senior stakeholders including a productive meeting with the Foreign Secretary the previous week along with the Chair.

4. Corporate Plan

John Worne referred the Board to the tabled copy of the Corporate Plan and summarised the changes made since the last Board meeting in response to Trustees' and other stakeholders' feedback.

Trustees agreed that it is a high quality plan, has been extremely responsive to feedback, and is more overtly engaged with external stakeholders' agendas than previously.

They observed that the description of our purpose and value is very clear and encouraged management to align staff behind it so we are articulating it more consistently and coherently.

They also had a discussion on stakeholder requests for more arts work, the extent to which we can realistically respond and resource, and how we manage expectations. It was agreed that the organisation needs to do more to communicate with Heads of Mission and other stakeholders on what it is already doing, how it prioritises and who it works with. The discussion will be continued during the arts item at the May Board.

Trustees approved the Corporate Plan. In parallel it has gone to the Foreign Office for ministerial sign off.

The CEO gave a brief update on the Comprehensive Spending Review and initial discussions with the FCO.

The COO referred Trustees to the Operating Plan highlights in the COO report. This is currently being finalised.

5. Digital

The Chair welcomed Harriet Green and Rosemary Hilhorst to the meeting.

John Worne reminded the Board that this item had been carried over from the December meeting but that earlier in the year Trustees had received an update by email. Today's presentation builds on that and will ask Trustees for views on how we are using the new platform.

Harriet talked through the benefits of the Solas platform and showed Trustees how flexible it is, is easy to update, multi-lingual, secure and user-friendly. She noted that reach by social media will be up to 25 million by April.

Trustees were pleased to see the progress that has been made and also to hear that a training programme had run alongside the roll-out process across the world to build up staff expertise. They noted that commercial aspects need more focus over the next phase of development to bring on board online payments, more digital marketing, etc.

Rosemary then gave a presentation on digital in the context of the EU Europe strategy. There it is enabling us to work in countries where we don't have a presence, e.g. the Roots and Trees project in Belarus where we are working with the Goethe Institute. It is also creating a platform for modernising our offer in countries where we do have a presence, e.g. MyClass which is increasing student uptake for English teaching.

Trustees congratulated her on the progress made.

6. Regional overview: Middle East and North Africa

The Chair welcomed Adrian Chadwick and Kate Ewart-Biggs to the meeting.

Adrian Greer introduced the session which is in response to a request from Trustees for more in-depth reviews of specific regions. Adrian Chadwick and Kate Ewart-Biggs talked through the political context, security issues, UK interests, our current response and the challenges we face in the region.

Trustees had a discussion on the importance of long-term commitment and presence, being true to our mission, and the trust this has built up in the region. They agreed that the balance between maintaining a presence when the security environment becomes challenging and protecting staff is a fine one which requires constant thought and judgement. They welcomed the research we are doing in the region to build an evidence base for making decisions on where we put our resources. They encouraged more work with partners and through digital to extend our reach, but overall were impressed with the impact we are making in important, sometimes challenging, and fast moving environments.

Trustees thanked Adrian and Kate for a thought provoking paper and presentation.

7. Chief Operating Officer's Report

Adrian updated Trustees on the in-year position which is on target. He informed them that work continues on investment to ensure we have a manageable set of change agendas, with standard processes in place to streamline reporting.

He drew the Trustees' attention to a fraud which had been reported recently and the CFO also referred to a further 3 small ones that had been reported in the last week. She observed that a typical pattern in an organisation is that as you train staff and build a culture of confidence in the whistleblowing policy, reporting tends to go up. Therefore an increase is to be expected but the pattern should also be that we catch them at an earlier stage. She also noted that we have recruited a counter-fraud expert to take up post in June, whose expertise will add further strength to the control framework.

8. Chair's business

The Chair reported back on the Finance & Contracts Committee (FCC) meeting which had taken place on 5 March. He said that the Committee had reviewed a case for the pursuit of a DFID funded programme in Afghanistan called Tawanmandi Phase II and recommend it to the Board for approval. The Board approved.

He also informed Trustees that he, David Verey and Gareth Bullock with some of the Executive will review the Terms of Reference and governance for the FCC, Audit Committee and BC Holdings to see if they might benefit from a change, and will bring a proposal to the next Board meeting.

The Chair drew Trustees' attention to the proposed response to various of the recommendations from the Board Effectiveness Review. Generally they were supportive of the approach and will make any other comments direct to the Secretariat as they come up.

He asked Rosemary Kelly for any comments on issues arising from the Country Committees in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. Rosemary reported that she had had a call with the two other

chairs to discuss how they will report to the Board and will present a short summary at future meetings.

9. Any other business

There was no other business and the meeting ended at 12.30.

There was then a closed session for Trustees. During this session Trustees unanimously elected Deborah Bronnert, Chief Operating Officer, FCO to replace Matthew Rycroft subject to confirmation of the appointment by the Foreign Secretary.

Summary of action points arising

Updated from previous meetings

(01)4	Bring economic modelling for review via FCC	2015
(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
(01)5	GIS – come back to the Board with a timeline/milestones	By email

Current meeting

(02)8	Review TORs/governance of FCC, Audit Committee and BC Holdings	May 2015
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