

In confidence

BCB(15)5th meeting

Tuesday 27 October 2015

MINUTES

Present

Vernon Ellis Chair
Janet Beer
Gareth Bullock
James Cronin
Rohan Gunatillake
Howell James
Kirsty Lang
Ros Marshall
Usha Prashar
Martin Roth
Tom Thomson
David Verey

In attendance

Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive
Kate Ewart-Biggs, Director Global Network
Adrian Greer, Chief Operating Officer
Helen Murley, Director HR
Mark Robson, Director English
Graham Sheffield, Director Arts
Mandy Johnson, Regional Director Sub Saharan Africa (item 5)
Andy Hansen, Head of Society (item 6)
Alison Coutts, Secretary

1. Apologies for absence & declarations of interest

Deborah Bronnert had sent apologies for her absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

The Chair welcomed James Cronin to his first Board meeting.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 7 July 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 noted the relevance of the Sustainable Development Goals to our work in society, and the helpful context it gives us to frame and explain our own ambitions more clearly.

He updated Trustees on the UK-China People to People Dialogue which seemed to have gone well. The British Council staff in China had done an amazing job, particularly around the culture agenda, and there has been lots of positive feedback.

He mentioned the dinner discussion he'd hosted on Syrian refugees and the Mediterranean migrant crisis and the issues it raises for our own work. We are already teaching English in the camps but could do more. He had had a discussion with the CEO of the Goethe Institute about whether there are some creative ways we can work together to increase impact and reach. This will be followed up.

He highlighted progress on the UKVI contract. Although it is very challenging, with 114 centres set up in the first six weeks we are on track.

4. Chairs business

The Chair led a discussion on follow up to the Board Away Day in September. Trustees agreed to the next steps proposed in the Chair's paper. This includes working through the Audit & Finance Committee, Contracts Committee and executive led People and Stakeholder groups to oversee progress on the critical success factors identified. The CEO will share more detail on what the groups will work on, who will convene, and how Trustees will be appropriately involved.

He proposed and Usha seconded a motion for the election of Oliver Laird to the Board of Trustees. This was agreed unanimously.

He briefed Trustees on the recent Contracts Committee meeting. He recommended the following contracts and frameworks for approval:

- a revised bid for the DFID funded Partnerships for Higher Education contract: contract value £49million
- a bid for inclusion in the FCO Conflict Stability and Security Fund Framework (CSSF)
- the British Council and Pearson Qualifications International (PQI) Global Agreement.

Trustees approved each of the above.

Trustees also agreed that it would be helpful if the Contracts Committee produced an annual update to Trustees describing the overall picture, the pipeline, success, challenges and learning points, to provide context to the contracts that come through during the year.

The Chair asked Trustees for their endorsement of the proposal to reappoint Cameron Cartmell as an independent member of the Audit & Finance Committee for a further 3 years. The Trustees endorsed the proposal.

He referred to the note on recent discussions in the devolved country committees and noted that advertisements for new chairs for the Northern Ireland and Wales Committees are being prepared.

He drew the Trustees' attention to the proposals for strengthening engagement. Trustees were happy with the suggestions which will be taken forward by the Secretariat.

5. Sub Saharan Africa: strategic overview

The Chair welcomed Mandy Johnson, Regional Director Sub Saharan Africa to the meeting.

Mandy gave a short presentation to build on the themes and issues raised in her paper.

Trustees thanked her for the on-going work on the ground and the clear ambition. They asked for more clarity on how the programmes and finances connect, funding sources, affordability, where efficiencies will come from, who our partners are, etc. as otherwise it's hard for the Board to see what's possible. Likewise, in order to comment on geographical spread more information on the

overall picture is necessary to understand what might be reasonable. They commented that it would also be helpful to have more analysis of the impact of what has already been done and the lessons learned and where we can make most impact at scale going forward.

The Board asked for an updated analysis and strategy to come to Trustees next year which also takes into account the Comprehensive Spending Review outcomes and addresses the comments made above.

6. Society Strategy

The Chair welcomed Andy Hansen, Head of Society, to the meeting.

Andy gave a short presentation on our strategy and areas of work.

Trustees agreed that we probably need more in-house and genuinely flexible and mobile expertise if we are to further increase impact significantly. They also emphasised that it is important to be absolutely clear on what we mean by moving towards a professional service model in future in terms of what services we will offer and what sorts of projects we'll take on. It will also require a clear economic model to underpin. Trustees also asked for more analysis on what we've already done so we can identify elements that lead to success and replicate them.

Trustees noted that our work in society is in a much better place than it was a few years ago and great progress has been made.

7. Chief Operating Officer's report

The Chair asked Adrian to update Trustees on an adjustment to his role. He confirmed that going forward he has a clear remit to lead on driving planning and measurement of performance, taking a 3 year outlook. The finance team will of course have an essential role feeding into and supporting the processes. As part of this he will be introducing a quarterly view of organisational performance, not just in finance but across the board.

He noted that the mid-year business review and forecasting will be completed in November but from the figures in the CFO report the financials look more or less on track. He asked Mark Robson to give a brief update on areas in which we are making progress in diversifying our English offer. Mark mentioned the following:

- The Rwanda STEM (Supporting Teachers English through Mentoring) programme which won the Commonwealth Good Practice Award in Education reached 490 primary teachers in 36 schools across Rwanda, and pre-post assessments demonstrated that 86% of these had improved their English as a result.
The new Mexico City "Learning Time with Shaun and Timmy" teaching centre is our third early years teaching centre for the under 6s, after Santiago and Singapore. We have additionally so far had approximately 10,000 "Learning Time with Shaun and Timmy" apps downloaded at £2.29 each
- The latest forecast shows overall E&E surpluses projecting to be at plan target level, but not higher.

He asked Helen Murley to give an update on the Pulse Survey. Helen noted that the challenge is that the overall responses are broadly static. In many ways this is good news as engagement is extremely high compared to other organisations in both the public and private sectors. However, it is still important to see progress rather than stay steady. One issue to concentrate on is the concern about high workloads. Significant investment is going into programmes to streamline processes and systems which should help, and HR are also working on configuring roles better so remits are clearer.

8. Report from Audit & Finance Committee

David Verey reported on the meeting of 13th October. The Committee had observed that there are several large and complex programmes of work to be done by the organisation, including the demand

on the Shared Service Centre and the premises move, and the Management Information project. He noted a need for a greater sense of prioritisation across and within these projects.

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 (Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

A briefing on the new management information system will be provided to all Trustees early in 2016.

9. Arts strategy review

Graham gave an overview of progress on the arts strategy which was presented at the Board meeting in May 2015. He focussed particularly on the impact we're making, how we are increasing collaboration and partnerships with the sector, the business model and the collection.

Trustees were pleased with progress and encouraged continuous rigour in terms of increasing partnerships across the sector and ensuring a sustainable model.

10. Status resolution: UAE

The Board approved a resolution to establish a branch in the United Arab Emirates. The resolution was proposed by Vernon Ellis and seconded by David Verey.

11. Any other business

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 (Commercial interests) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

There was no other business and the meeting ended at 13.00.

Summary of action points arising

Updated from previous meetings

(01)4	Bring economic modelling for review via A&FC	2016
(03)3	Include a session on headcount and what good looks like	2016
(03)4	Include a session on EO&D targets, particularly on race	2016
(01)5	GIS – come back to the Board with a timeline/milestones	By email
(03)4	Develop the English strategy with contributions from Janet, Ros, David and Gareth before bringing back to the Board next year	2016
(04)7	Update the risk format to provide a 3 year projection	2016

Current meeting

(05)4	Share a brief with Trustees on taking forward away day follow up	2016
(05)4	Include an update from the Contracts Committee in the annual agenda	2016
(05)5	Updated SSA strategy to come back to the Board	Mid-2016
(05)8	Include briefing on Management Information project in a Board meeting	Feb 2016