

Minutes of the 25th Meeting of the English UK Accreditation and Professional Services Board (APSB)

Held at: English UK, 219 St John Street, London EC1V 4LY

Date: 13:30 on Thursday, 16th June 2011

Present: Andrew Hjort (Chair), Dawn Abbott, Alison Chambers, Sarah Cooper, Tony Evans, Janey Futerill and Geoff Hardy-Gould

In attendance: Mark Rendell, Yvonne Bader and Siobhan Baccas

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Sue Edwards, Patrick Lawlor and Tony Millns.

2. Minutes of the 24th meeting of the APSB held on Tuesday, 15th March 2011

The Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of the Meeting.

In item 6a it was pointed out that AC and not SC, had made reference to FE colleges in Scotland.

3. Matters arising

None (all matters arising were covered by the agenda for the meeting).

4. Matters for discussion and decision

Training days strategy 2011-2012

MR spoke to the paper highlighting the key performance indicators for the year and summarised measures to improve the management of the training day programme in the year ahead. Despite concern over the past few years he reported that 2010/11 had been a positive year and drew particular attention to the excellent work of Yvonne Bader and Bettina Sattler's since the turn of the year.

MR stressed that training days represented very good value when members took advantage of the 3 for 2 special offer and that some members had needed to be convinced of this fact as several members had previously perceived the cost to be too high. With regards to the 3-for-2 offer, TE asked if one had to sign up for all three training days at once. MR responded that this was not necessary, but that the offer had been promoted in such a way as to secure upfront bookings and payments.

With regards to the concern that training days appear to be less well subscribed towards the end of the year (October-December), TE felt that information about the training days either arrived too late or that staff were too busy to read about them. It was also noted by JF that many staff members take holiday in September and AH conjectured that after the summer break it takes a while for people to get into gear for the new academic year. SC added that the state sector is also pre-occupied with large student intakes in the autumn.

Generally, the Board felt that late October to early November should be a good time for training. GH suggested publishing the training calendar in September for the following calendar year allowing a longer lead-in time. Other Board members felt it was a good idea to extend the published academic year calendar to include training dates for the October to December period of the following academic year. It was also suggested that information indicating the training days on offer in the autumn could be published in the spring to give a taste of what was to come. The Board agreed that the regular reminders about training had been useful.

The Board discussed the implications of a new remuneration system. MR explained that the change should encourage trainers to make more effort to promote themselves within the sector and to be better rewarded for delivering a popular session. AH remarked that some trainers would be paid less, however, MR estimates that it will only apply to approximately 28% of sessions and that it was wrong to be well rewarded for a lack of success. TE wondered if there may be a tendency for trainers to cancel if too few register. MR explained that a session could be cancelled if participants and the trainer felt the number was not viable otherwise there would be a contractual obligation on the part of the trainer to deliver the session.

SC asked whether the new pay system could be put to one side on some occasions where a session was particularly relevant to the sector and MR confirmed that this would be possible. JF enquired whether the popularity of a training day was based on the reputation of the speaker or the session topic and MR stated that both were significant factors. AH suggested that some titles could be changed to more clearly describe the contents of the session. GH suggested that the final line in the remuneration table should read, '14 delegates and above', in case a larger room is utilized. The Board endorsed the proposed new incentive-based remuneration system.

The Board recommended that English UK should consider purchasing an interactive whiteboard and then, offer sessions to members on how to use one. AH suggested that English UK try to negotiate with the main suppliers. AC noted that maintenance was expensive and should be considered as a factor before purchase.

GH suggested a training day on self-assessment and the Board agree to send MR any ideas or suggestions that they had concerning the composition of the next training programme.

The Board endorsed all of the action points in the report.

5. Professional Services – updates

5a. Cambridge ESOL sponsorship agreement

MR spoke to paper. Agreement on the renewal of the Cambridge ESOL sponsorship agreement is in place and is due to be concluded the following week. MR added that the barter deal with IATEFL will be renewed as well which involves an exchange of exhibition stands at each other's conferences.

5b. Business English Trainers Conference Report

YB spoke to the paper. The conference, organised in association with Business English UK, was held at International House London. Feedback indicated that delegates were happy with the venue and organisation of the event, however, some commented that some speakers spoke off topic. YB reported that the majority of delegates were new attendees with some returning customers demonstrating the success of the advertising.

The attendance for the event was a little disappointing and YB made a series of suggestions as to how to increase attendance in the future including finding out what delegates are interested in, addressing invitations to the right person in the organisation, getting the programme on the website earlier, loyalty booking discounts, marketing in the media and posting testimonials to the website.

TE speculated that perhaps some schools, although offering business English courses, felt the event lacked relevance as they did not have a discrete business English centre. MR agreed that it would be beneficial to be able to get information out directly to individuals like freelance teachers and added that some leading business English centres were not members of English UK. MR will work on developing English UK's database.

MR commented that the conference has a loyal custom base but that several had sent fewer delegates for a variety of factors including the fact that several centres were very busy at that time of year. As IATEFL is in March in 2012 it may be possible to bring the conference earlier into late April or early May.

5c. Staffing matters

With TM planning to reduce his work load from late 2012, it is intended that the DCE's will assume more responsibility. However, an opportunity to restructure has arisen earlier than expected as both the Membership Manager and Customers Services Officer have recently tendered their resignations. MR will have line management responsibility for the front desk and membership functions and it is felt that English UK will benefit from the closer alignment of professional services with these membership service functions along similar lines to the recent integration of the StudyWorld and Marketing teams. Additionally, a Professional Services Manager will be recruited to aid MR in his responsibilities.

5d. Accreditation Consultancy Scheme

MR updated the Board on the latest ACS subscribers. Four applications have been received recently with three from already accredited centres.

6. Accreditation Matters - updates

6a. ASAC

MR noted that the following centres had been accredited for the first time at the last ASAC meeting: Al Hayat International Language Centre (Burnley), London House School of English (Margate) and The Northern School of Languages (ABLS and Leeds). MR noted that ABLS membership had reduced to 24 centres. It was noted that following a review of points of excellence for teaching and learning that there appeared to be more positive findings in the classroom observation section of recent reports.

6b. Statutory accreditation

AH updated the Board on the Educational Oversight arrangements. He noted that The Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) was likely to become the agency responsible for the inspection of private sector English language schools, with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) responsible for the private college and higher education sector. It was noted that it is also likely that QAA will assess foundation courses, as a type of HE provision. TE asked if centres would have to apply for ISI and QAA if they offered such courses.

English UK and ISI are due to meet on 5th July to discuss how to proceed and it is hoped that Accreditation UK (AUK) will be used as a model or partner for ISI inspections. There is concern that if ISI do not use the AUK model that they will not be able to inspect all of the schools by the set deadline. TE commented that the ideal situation would be for AUK to become recognised as a statutory body.

6c. Teacher qualifications – MR

MR presented a document, drafted by Janelle Cooper at Accreditation UK, detailing the various teacher qualifications. MR stressed that the list of acceptable teaching qualifications would not be suitable for public dispersal because of the sensitivity of the content. SC argued that a DTLLS qualification should be accepted for TEFLQ purposes. MR noted that there was a possibility that the English UK DELTM could be added to the list of acceptable qualifications for an academic manager to hold. The Board endorsed the findings of the document.

6d. Development of the Accreditation UK Scheme

Self-evaluation

MR spoke to the paper. AH reported on discussions at the AUK EB and that there seemed to be a difference in opinion on how to take the issue of self-evaluation forward. MR noted that the BC had discussed self-evaluation with teachers and academic managers and they would naturally have a different perspective on self-evaluation than centre managers. Many of the proposals made by the BC would appear to mean an increase and not a decrease in workload for centres which was not the intention of the proposal. As developments in statutory accreditation could complicate this issue the Board agreed to postpone any further examination of the issue until the outcome of talks between ISI and English UK become clear.

Points of excellence

With regards to points of excellence and publishable statements, MR outlined a suggestion from the accreditation unit that instead of points of excellence, sub-section summaries could be used to indicate strengths and weaknesses. MR invited the Board to discuss the merits of such a change. MR noted that such a change would give inspectors more flexibility as they look at qualitative results. However, on the downside the change would make reports less quantitative and make it harder for the ASAC to scrutinise, there was also the issue of subjectivity of the inspectors.

TE favours a 'met', 'not met' system with the eradication of points of excellence altogether. AH explained that he had tabled a paper that was designed to ensure a similar number of points of excellence to be available in each sub-section, with clarification on which of the criteria could qualify for a point of excellence and with a revamped number of sub-sections.

The Board were not convinced of the merits of adopting a system of strength/weaknesses indicators but as GH stated, it was clear that the current system needed to change. This matter will now be examined by a working party.

Standardisation

TE commented that the Scheme currently lacked standardisation in the judgments of inspectors and that efforts would be well spent addressing this issue. SC commented that it would be impossible for inspectors to be entirely objective but that better standardisation in the moderation process would ensure greater consistency. TE also suggested that clearer reference be made in reports to previous inspection reports.

6e. Accreditation Conference

MR informed the Board of the British Council's plan to collaborate with NEAS (Australia) in the organisation of an Accreditation Conference in London on 1st September 2011. The event will present accrediting bodies with an opportunity to share best practice. MR has been approached to lead discussion session A3 and SC volunteered to collaborate with him on this.

6f. Minutes from Accreditation UK Board Meeting

The Board noted the minutes of the Accreditation UK Executive Board Meeting without comment on 20th April 2011.

7. Industry updates

7a. English Profile event

MR spoke to the paper and updated Board members about the English Profile project and the fact that English UK was one of the founding partners in the project. Work started on the Profile to address weaknesses in the CEFR specifically at A1 and C1 and C2 and a set of new descriptors have been developed specifically for the English language. The project is led by Cambridge ESOL, Cambridge University Press, English UK, the University of Bedfordshire and the British Council. A link to the English Profile website is available in the Training section of the English UK website.

MR reported that English UK was hoping to collaborate in a number of upcoming promotional events including potential StudyWorld sponsorship, promotion at the English UK Teachers Conference and a joint event with the British Council in January. Specifics of the Profile will be available to the public in the autumn and it is expected that the Profile will supersede the CEFR as a basis for course-book and curricula development.

7b. British Council English Agenda

MR informed the Board that the British Council was becoming increasingly active in supporting teachers in the UK. He made reference to the new English Agenda website that will act as a CPD portal for English teachers in the UK with support materials, an explanation of the new CPD

framework and links to British Council research and other activities. The English UK logo will be present on the website and will link teachers to the database of English UK member centres.

8. Next Meeting

11am on Wednesday, 2nd November 2011

9. Any Other Urgent Business

MR noted that after enquiries from The Open University and Language Lab (Second Life Campus) that the topic of accreditation for online ELT providers had been broached with the Accreditation Unit. It was felt important that the Scheme moved with the times and kept abreast of modern technology.

The meeting concluded at 3pm.