

Minutes of the 33rd Meeting of the English UK Board

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

Date/time: 12:30 on Thursday 13 January 2011

Present: Sue Edwards (Chair), John Barnett, Kate Cadwgan-Evans, Alison Chambers, Sarah Cooper, Michael Cornes, Jane Dancaster, Richard Day, Caroline Hugo, Sarah Schechter, Graham Simpson and Shane Wilkinson.

In attendance: Tony Millns, Mark Rendell and Annie Wright.

Constitutional business

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Andrew Hjort (observer).

2. Minutes of the meeting on 14 October 2010

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

3. Matters arising and updates

TM spoke to the paper.

Judicial Review costs

TM informed the Board Penningtons have been instructed to settle if the midpoint could be reached at £190,000. The decision was taken following consultation with the Chair and Chair of Finance Panel and it is hoped this will avoid the need to have legal costs draftsmen debate every item of the costs point by point.

Regions

JD updated the Board on the latest state of play concerning the formation of English UK London. The London Managers group of London-based British Council accredited centres was dissolved in December 2010. The group was formed in 1999 and was an informal grouping with no subscription and no staff/executive team. The focus was on meetings to network and discuss marketing. Approximately 40 members attended the final meeting on 4 December and no one was in disagreement about dissolving the group in favour of an official English UK regional group. Membership of English UK London will be open to all English UK member centres with a London postcode on a subscription basis. English UK London intends to launch a website and employ an intern on a part-time basis, ideally located at St John Street. SW proposed sharing an intern with English UK South.

SW updated the Board on the latest state of play concerning the formation of English UK South. The group was due to meet the following day, Friday 14 January, to discuss a draft charter. The regional boundary for English UK South will reach from Dorset and up to

Oxfordshire, incorporating Wiltshire and Berkshire and bordering the counties covered by English UK South West and English UK Central. The Isle of Wight and Hampshire will also be included but Sussex, Surrey and Bedfordshire will not.

Annual Conference and AGM 2011

Further to the update in the papers TM reported the good news from Roz confirming Le Meridien Piccadilly has agreed to pick up the £18,300 additional costs of holding the conference in an alternative venue. English UK's 2011 Annual Conference and AGM will be held in Prospero House in London on 25 and 26 May. TM asked the Board to forward any ideas or requests for specific topics or speakers to TM or Roz by the end of the month.

The Board supported the idea of a resolution to confer Honorary Membership on Charles Harrison at the 2011 AGM. The motion will be proposed by MC and seconded by JD.

RD asked for an update on the All-Party Parliamentary Group and TM reported the Group needed one more Labour MP to join in order to re-convene.

4. Membership of the association and committees

TM spoke to the paper.

New members

The Board noted the receipt of application forms from Tellus Plymouth and Twin Summer Centres and agreed to admit LAL London into membership. The Board delegated authority to the Chief Executive to accept into membership the three centres whose completed applications are expected in the coming weeks. These centres are British Study Centres Bournemouth, Southampton Language College, and Mountlands Language School.

2010 subscription debtors

The Board noted the three centres that have debts relating to 2010 subscriptions and Accreditation UK fees and agreed that a letter should be issued to each centre advising that the usual condition will be set. TM agreed to drop in on Brudenell School of English, who are based in Ealing, to discuss their relatively small subscription debt. MC proposed legal steps should be taken to recover all costs and TM commented that County Court Action would be the ultimate step.

Honorary Members

TM reported David Egerton's obituary, as featured in The Times in November 2010, would feature in the next English UK newsflash.

Corporate Members

The Board noted Britain's Educational Services (BES) acceptance of the Board's proposal regarding membership terms and conditions following the 32nd meeting of the Board.

MC asked why the BBC World Service and International Students House (ISH) were leaving membership. TM reported the BBC had given no explanation but general austerity measures in the public sector and a change in staff were likely explanations. ISH had provided feedback and mentioned that they felt they had received value for money from their membership to date but that they could forego membership in 2011 but didn't rule out re-joining in the future. They had probably extracted as much value as they are going to get in the medium term.

CH questioned whether any member centres had expressed strong resistance towards paying their contribution to the residual costs of the judicial review. TM confirmed a small number of centres had objected and had subsequently received a response from TM explaining the general principles of an association.

Matters for discussion and decision

5. General approach to lobbying and campaigns

TM spoke to the paper which outlined the association's current approach to lobbying and set out the need for the Board to consider and take a view on the association's current stance, 'tone' and approach in terms of lobbying before considering the draft submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee.

SC expressed her support for the current approach and commented that the paper set out a coherent and pragmatic response and a sensible way forward.

The Board endorsed the general lines of the current approach as set out in the paper.

TM noted his intention to cover the association's approach and stance in terms of lobbying in a session at the Annual Conference in May.

TM informed the Board of Catherine Marston's relocation to Washington (Catherine was policy adviser at Universities UK). It was reported that she has not yet been replaced but a representative from GuildHE was currently standing in and working on Universities UK submission to the Home Affairs Select Committee. GS reported he attended a Select Committee Meeting at which the universities were very vocal.

6. Student visa review – English UK draft submission and reports on meetings

TM spoke to the paper which included English UK's draft response to the UKBA consultation on the student immigration system. The consultation was launched in early December coinciding with the announcement of the extension of the Student Visitor visa validity to 11 months.

TM suggested Jeremy Oppenheim and Glyn Williams of the Border Agency will expect English UK's response to have a navigable line, and this should be constructed around better accreditation and Highly Trusted Sponsor status.

TM confirmed the draft response would be communicated to member centres early next week, following the Board's endorsement comments. TM reported the new rules are expected to be announced in mid-March and will subsequently come into effect in early April but with a phased transitional period which could last 24 months.

MC informed the Board that Study Group supports a wide-ranging response and will be encouraging all staff, students, host families and agents to reply. It was suggested English UK urge all member centres to do the same.

SC supported the proposed tightening up of accreditation and observed that this would be good for the UK's reputation for quality.

SW noted the draft response made no reference to the financial impact of the proposed changes. TM confirmed this was a deliberate omission as he believed the UKBA would receive this information from other sources, such as the responses from individual centres like StudyGroup. TM also stated he was reluctant to go into figures as he did not have 100% confidence in them whereas individual centres are more able to make a realistic reference to the financial impact for their business/region.

JD questioned the level of engagement of the British Council. TM confirmed he had a long telephone conversation with Liz McLaren and John Knagg of the British Council before they attended an internal meeting to develop the overall BC response.

The Board endorsed the response and the action.

7. Home Affairs Committee – draft response

TM spoke to the paper which included English UK's draft submission to the inquiry announced by the Home Affairs Committee in December 2010. TM read out Keith Vaz's statement in launching the inquiry to the Board and noted English UK's submission supported that of Vaz.

The Board endorsed the submission and offered its congratulations to the Chief Executive on two very well thought though and coherent submissions.

8. Staff matters

TM informed the Board of current concerns, with input from AW and MR. TM outlined the options available. The Board noted the concerns and a way forward was agreed.

TM also informed the Board of the departure of Alex Jones, who is moving on to a new post at South Thames College. RD raised the matter of staff salaries in relation to staff retention, and TM asked if he would propose a significant increase in subscriptions to the AGM to allow for substantial pay increases.

9. Succession planning

This item was taken at conclusion of the meeting with only Board members and the Chief Executive present. It was agreed to establish a working group consisting of SE, SC, JD and CH to discuss the matter in detail and report back to the Board at the next meeting.

Matters for report and information

10. Accreditation UK Executive Board, 3 November 2010

The Board noted the minutes.

RD questioned if there were any plans for the accreditation scheme post-2012. TM noted there was no point in entering into negotiations for this period just yet as so much depended on the UKBA and the student visa review.

11. APSB, 14 October 2010

The Board noted the minutes and MR confirmed an oral report of the 14 October APSB meeting was given at the 32nd meeting of the Board.

Other business

12. Dates of future meetings

Thursday 14 April 2011
Thursday 16 June 2011
Thursday 20 October 2011

All meetings will be held at English UK, 219 St John Street, London EC1V 4LY.

13. Any other urgent business

TM reported on the UKBA Corporate Stakeholders meeting that took place in the morning prior to the Board meeting. The Border Agency presented a business plan for 2011-2014 which showed forecast immigration figures with tourists and students at present levels.

SW raised Mark Lindsay's proposal, posted to the English UK e-forum on 10 January 2011, on the future of Student Visitor visas and the random sampling of data concerning SVVs and student attendance. TM confirmed that he had discussed with Mark a proposal to make this a compulsory requirement of membership provided that it was based on random sampling and that no one centre or organisation should be required to submit data for any quarterly sample more than once. Mark is considering putting this as a resolution at the 2011 AGM.

The meeting concluded at 15:10.