

Minutes of the 35th Meeting of the English UK Main Board

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

Date/time: 10:00 on Thursday, 16 June 2011

Present: Sue Edwards (Chair), John Barnett, Kate Cadwgan-Evans, Sarah Cooper, Jane Lancaster, Steve Phillips, Richard Day, Kevin McNally, Caroline Hugo, Sarah Cooper (from 10:22) and Shane Wilkinson.

In attendance: Andrew Hjort (observer), Tony Millns, Mark Rendell and Annie Wright.

Constitutional business

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Graham Simpson and Michael Cornes.

2. Declaration of Interests

TM reminded the Board that this item would become a regular item on the agenda and Board members should declare if they had any potential conflict of interest in any of the items on the agenda before the meeting commenced. No Board member made a declaration of interest.

3. Minutes of the 34th meeting (part one) held on 14 April 2011 and the 34th Meeting (part two) on the 25 May 2011.

The Board agreed to nominate a charity that it would support on an annual basis. TM invited Board members to nominate worthy charities for the next Board meeting

The Minutes were agreed to be an accurate record of both meetings.

4. Matters arising and updates

TM spoke to the paper.

Educational oversight for accreditation

TM posited that the UKBA were likely to instruct the new bodies with responsibility for educational oversight to focus on academic rigour as opposed to a visa gatekeeping roll. He also noted that a recent attempt at an impact assessment on the effects of the new visa regulations had concluded that instead of the government's target for an 80,000 reduction in net migration the figure was more likely to be around 40-50,000.

TM reaffirmed that English UK's preferred option would be a combined inspection with the Independent School's Inspectorate (ISI). JD has been informed by ISI that they plan to start a consultation about the development of an ELT accreditation scheme in June with a view to

commencing inspections in October. TM will advise centres to respond to the consultation saying that the new scheme should be just like the Accreditation UK Scheme.

As the ELT sector is 85% adult and highly specialised whereas the ISI scheme specialises in accreditation for school age children, the appropriateness of their inspection team and ability to cope with the volume of inspections is likely to be an issue. TM feels there is very good complementarity with ISI for Accreditation UK. CH noted that the self-evaluation aspects of the ISI scheme were very strong but that Accreditation UK was superior in many regards.

TM speculated that BAC centres would be more likely to seek accreditation through the QAA.

5. Membership of the association

TM spoke to the paper.

New members

The Board noted the receipt of membership application forms from E-Thames Graduate School and OISE at Sherbourne Priors and agreed to admit these centres into membership

The Board delegated authority to the Chief Executive to accept into membership, Accord English Academy in Manchester, formerly Active English Academy in Manchester, when the membership application has been received.

The Closure of London College Wimbledon

TM updated the Board about the closure of London College Wimbledon. With the recent changes to the points-based visa system, the owners of the centre felt that there was a danger of the centre no longer being a going concern and took the pre-emptive decision to cease trading. He stated that it had been difficult to provide support for the students concerned because the directors were no longer contactable.

So far, only 10-12 students had come forward and most had now been placed in nearby centres. TM noted that there had only been a minimal burden on the SESF as most of the students were residing with family or friends. TM had informed the UKBA as soon as English UK was made aware of the closure but noted the difficulties in obtaining a new visa for these students. In a recent meeting, Jeremy Oppenheim from the UKBA became more sympathetic when he learned that the centres that had taken over the course provision were not benefitting financially. TM will continue to work for an easier transfer of student visas seeking exemptions from the existing formalities.

JD stressed that there had been some reputational damage caused in the Wimbledon area and wondered whether such centres could be barred from membership in the future after irregularities had come to light. TM stressed that as accreditation was the threshold to membership it would be difficult to establish robust measures to deny membership on any other grounds and that the centre's continuing accreditation after problems had first surfaced lay with the accreditation body.

Outstanding Annual Declarations and Debtors

The Board noted that three centres still had debts relating to 2010 subscriptions and Accreditation UK fees and endorsed the Chief Executive's stated actions.

TM reported that two centres had still not settled their obligations under the Judicial Review case. As previously stated, Langside College were supportive of the UKBA position and refused to contribute to the fund but Bath Academy's position was unclear. TM will contact Bath Academy shortly. If either centre persists with non-payment they will face expulsion from the Association.

Corporate Membership

An application from Penningtons solicitors to become a corporate member of English UK was pending and TM informed the Board that the company planned to invite the Board to a wine tasting at Vinopolis.

Accreditation Consultancy Scheme (ACS)

MR reported that 3 out of the 4 most recent applications to use the scheme had been from accredited member centres. The main reasons for these consultancies were to obtain help with the re-positioning of a centre in light of changes to the PBS, support and review of the academic management provision and to support new senior management personnel who were unfamiliar with the accreditation scheme.

6. Membership of the Board and other bodies plus external representation

Main Board

SE was re-appointed by acclamation to the position of Chair of English UK. JD proposed SC for vice-Chair and SC was duly appointed unopposed to that position.

Accreditation and Professional Services Board

TM noted that as Janey Futerill had joined Regent, an OISE-owned operation, the group now had 2 members on the Board which presented a problem. TM will discuss the situation with Geoff Hardy-Gould who is the senior of the two. Irrespective of the outcome of those talks, the Board agreed to appoint Nigel Heritage to the Board. Nigel has a wealth of expertise in the summer vacation sector.

Enterprises Board

TM observed that London Meridian College had not yet complied with a judgment from the Ombudsman which could lead to expulsion from the Association and as a result could lead to Heidi Gon Paz being asked to withdraw from the Enterprises Board. TM will discuss the matter further with Heidi.

AW reported that despite their recent poor attendance, both Andrew Fisher and Heidi Gon Paz had indicated that they were keen to continue on the Board and had assured the Board that their attendance would improve. SW suggested introducing a rule that if a Board member missed 3 consecutive meetings (in effect a full year of sub-board meetings) then they should forfeit their place on that Board. The Board agreed to adopt this measure.

JD noted that as with the OISE representation on the APSB, there were two TUI representatives on the Enterprises Board, AF and KM.

SC observed that having the right people on the Board was important. The Board was pleased to note that Claire Gossage had returned from maternity leave and had agreed to resume her role on the Enterprises Board. Stefan Roussounis, from Cambridge Education Group had shown an interest and was also deemed to be a good candidate. The Board agreed to invite him to join the Enterprises Board.

In a further discussion on poor attendance, RD pointed out that the nature of the marketing role did entail a certain amount of overseas travel. To address this problem, SE suggested reviewing the timings of all subsequent meetings including the September date and KM suggested holding one of the meetings in July and another in mid-December in order to make the meetings more accessible to members. RD suggested a reduction in meetings to two but CH felt this would create issues with continuity. SW felt 3 meetings per year were about right.

In terms of direction of the Board, SW noted that the English UK marketing team did such a comprehensive job that meetings tended not to require a great deal of creativity on the part of Board members. SW suggested that the business of the Board could be subsumed into the agenda for the main Board but TM cautioned that this may result in main Board meetings being extended to 4-5 hours which would be untenable. TM suggested the Enterprises Board could become more of a sounding board for looking further into the future by playing more of a strategic role.

AW noted that obtaining feedback on current issues was still important. She also noted that since the marketing team had recently developed a programme template that could be repeated from year to year fewer decisions were needed by the Board.

Finance panel

TM informed the Board that replacements would be required to replace Charles Harrison and Steve Brent in time and noted that replacements did not need to be chartered accountants. The Board agreed to look out for suitable candidates.

External representation

The Board agreed to retain the same representation on the ELPG and the Accreditation UK Executive Board.

7. Proposal from the Ombudsman

The Board agreed with the Ombudsman on the importance of robust and timely settlement of complaints and supported the Ombudsman's proposal.

8. Review of the Annual Conference and AGM

It should be clarified that item 9 of the Minutes of the 2011 AGM refers to private sector providers only.

It was noted that the feedback rating for elective session A2 should read 3.9 instead of 2.2.

TM noted that attendance was a bit lower this year but JD noted that this could be interpreted as an indication that many members were busy. JD noted that attendance was problematic for many because of the closer proximity of the event to the busy summer season. The Board recommended that earlier dates either in late April or early May be considered. TM indicated that as the audit has been in February with a report to the Board in mid-April the idea of holding an earlier AGM and Conference could be explored for 2013. KCE warned that the AoC International Conference was usually held at around the 12 May and a English UK conference near that date would add pressure on FE nominated representatives.

TM confirmed the Russell Hotel has been provisionally booked for 23 and 24 May for the 2012 Annual Conference and AGM.

9. Board Elections and representation

TM spoke to the paper.

The Board unanimously supported the proposal to invite an observer from the HE sector to attend main Board meetings until the 2012 AGM. The Board agreed that Sarah Schechter should be the candidate of choice for this role.

It was agreed that a steering group be set up to examine how English UK serves the state sector. The group could be comprised of non-members as well as members. Four to five people could be approached who would commit to a couple of meetings. SC volunteered to coordinate such a grouping and KCE was also happy to be involved but wished to discuss her potential involvement in this group with her line manager first.

The idea of setting up a broadly representative nominations committee was also discussed and felt to be a pro-active way of recruitment. SE felt that wider participation was a good idea and would help the Board to be as representative of the membership as possible. TM explained that the committee which could be chaired by a non-affiliated individual would make known its preferred candidates for a seat on the Board but that other candidates would be free to stand alongside the committee's nominees. The Board agreed to adopt the measure and to discuss representation on the committee at the next Board meeting.

The Board discussed the need for Board members and prospective Board members to raise their profiles among the membership. KCE suggested that Board members do elective sessions at the Annual Conference. It was felt that Board members should have the opportunity to introduce themselves at the Annual Conference and AGM and attendance at other English UK conferences was felt to be important. Board members should always highlight the fact that they are a member of the Board in their bio-data, if presenting an elective session at an English UK event, and this status should be indicated on their event name-badge and in the delegate list. The Board also suggested that their profile on the English UK website should be enhanced and feature a short bio and photo.

It was noted that only 80 centres had voted in the ballot for seats for the Board. Although this turnout was considered low it was consistent with previous ballots. It was agreed that the postal ballot system be retained but that members should receive additional time to vote for the next election.

JD requested that clarification be provided on how long each Board member was permitted to stand on the Board before being required to either step down or stand for re-election.

Matters for discussion and decision

10. Strategy 2012-15, Initial exploration and scoping.

TM explained that the papers were produced to elaborate on the ideas raised at the last Board meeting (part two) and were an indication of how English UK was approaching each initiative.

He explained that the Partner Agency Scheme had already been launched. That MR was currently making presentations and facilitating discussion on the formation of a professional association and that the concept had been well received. The topics of international accreditation and international membership were to be examined from a local and international perspective.

SE felt that it would be nice to devote time and resources to these important issues when the visa situation had settled down. The Board was excited by the proposals and endorsed the outline plans.

11. Risk Register 2011

KCE asked why the level of risk had not been rated. TM noted that some risk assessments did assign a high/medium/low probability rating but stated that the approach adopted by English UK fell into two categories. Those risks you can do something about and those you can't do anything about.

CH asked about the security of assets such as the building. TM replied that the building was fully insured and remained an asset. English UK will need a re-evaluation of the value of the building next year.

SW enquired into the potential ramifications of dozens of member centres going bankrupt during a short space of time and whether the SESF would be able to meet its liabilities. TM replied that the scheme did not have liabilities per se and that when the fund was exhausted it would no longer be available.

TM does not expect widespread harm to the ELT sector because of the changes to the PBS but noted that the estimated 20 members that offered predominantly non-ELT courses of below degree level could be at risk of closure.

Matters for report and information

12. Enterprises Board Meeting on 19 May 2011

The Board noted the minutes.

JB asked whether regional groups had been canvassed about whether they wished to hold a regional groups meeting at the 2011 Annual Conference. AW replied that regional groups had not indicated the need for a meeting at this year's annual event. The Board felt that a regional groups meeting was the only real opportunity for all groups to get together and should be reintroduced in 2012.

It was noted that item 5 of the minutes should read Border Agency and not Boarder Agency.

13. Accreditation UK Executive Board on 20 April 2011

TM reported that the two chief inspectors had expressed a desire to step down from the role. The Accreditation UK Executive Board vetoed the Unit's proposal for the elevation of four senior inspectors to fulfil the role on a rolling basis in favour of one chief inspector for the Scheme. The Board suggested that English UK make a contribution to mark the dedication and service of the current chiefs.

14. Any Other business

None

15. Dates of future meetings

Thursday, 20 October 2011

Thursday, 12 January 2012

Wednesday, 4 April 2012 (NB. This is a new date)

Thursday, 14 June 2012

Thursday, 18 October 2012

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

The meeting concluded at 11:57.