

**MINUTES OF THE 140th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
TUESDAY 23 FEBRUARY AT 17.30**
*Meeting held remotely on the ZOOM platform
due to the on-going Coronavirus pandemic*

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Angela Entwistle (AEE), Cristina Carli Nonnato (CCN), Stewart Harris (SH), Patricia Edmondson (PED), Rachel Branagan (RB), Kevin Chamberlain (KC), Matt Gallagher (MGA), Joshua Hetherington (JHE)

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 17:30

1. Apologies

DW welcomed on-line presence of members of the Executive Board, who had joined the virtual meeting via the Zoom online meeting platform. The only absence was Tony Bothwell (TB) due to WIFI Constraints.

2. Declarations

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 December 2020 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

DW asked DMI if he will be updating the Board with the arrangements for testing students in the Academy, which DMI confirmed.

DW asked DMI if he will be updating the Board with the arrangements for setting grades and DMI confirmed that he will be in his presentation.

DW asked if there has been any update regarding the offensive weapons protocol and DMI advised the Board that there has been no update as yet.

DW updated the Board with information about two permanent exclusions that were taken to the Independent Review Panel and RW advised the Board of the process.

ATA have two cases in progress. ATA will look to address the process irregularities that were highlighted by the first Independent Review Panel but the second Independent Review Panel has yet to take place.

DMI advised the Board that, in schools generally, there is a pretty significant trend in the escalating number of Independent Review appeals about permanent exclusions over the last 8 years.

5. Principal's Report

DMI welcomed the Board and presented his report, which included a presentation from Matt Gallagher (MGA) and Joshua Hetherington (JHE).

DMI took the Board through the work that has been done already to prepare for the re-opening of the Academy.

DMI shared with the Board a presentation and said that he was particularly keen to hear from the parents about their view on ATA's approach to remote learning and on the plan for re-opening, mindful that parents want their children to return to school.

Over the Christmas break, ATA prepared for all students to return to the Academy and for the students to receive Lateral Flow Device (LFD) tests over a two-week period. At the time, schools were told that any student who had been in contact with someone who had tested positive for Coronavirus would be able to be "stream tested". Stream testing is the title given to a series of 7 LFD tests administered over seven days - one per day. If each test returns a negative result, the student does not need to isolate according to the NHS guidance. However, there was evidence after that announcement was made suggested that Coronavirus can develop over a period of 10 to 15 days, which would make the model proposed for stream testing insufficient to protect against transmission after 7 days. Updates were awaited.

Furthermore, the rate of transmission and hospitalisation was so significant that the government announced that schools would close after Christmas and that the country would be placed in lockdown.

DMI explained that all students and staff onsite during lockdown would take two LFD tests per week, something that would help make sure that the Academy is a safe environment. If an LFD test produces a positive result, the member of staff or the student must take a confirmatory PCR test.

ATA have been working on understanding the direction of travel as far as OfQUAL, the DfE and the International Baccalaureate Organisation (IBO) are concerned. Up until 15 February, the IB exams were planned to take place – however, the IBO subsequently announced that IB exams would be cancelled and the grades would be determined by a specific process which is a different process to that required for GCSE and A-Level students. Schools have not yet been told the details of this process and await further guidance.

All students will return to the Academy on 8 March and the Academy is now planning for the Year 11, 12 and 13 experience from that date. This experience needs to be meaningful and be able to help produce the evidence required to generate the most accurate grades for students in each subject. Students also need to be able to show their teachers that they have learnt and understood the new knowledge they have acquired over lockdown. The information schools need to receive from OfQUAL before we can plan should be received by Thursday. Therefore, more information will be released after this guidance has been published.

DMI advised the Board that there has been a great deal of thinking around the options. DMI made it clear that ATA will be transparent with the parents, staff and students so that everyone understands the process and what is required from the student. In this way, there will be no doubt in anyone's minds that the Academy will have given students every opportunity to demonstrate their standard in each subject.

The IB system will be slightly different. Students submit internally assessed (IA) work every year for each of their subjects. The IB might therefore produce a formula that will include prior attainment, which will be based on the grade achieved for the IA work versus the predicted grade that subject teachers set for each student - Teachers have to set a predicted grade every single year shortly before the students sit the final exam.

DMI told the Board that he will confirm plans with them after the Academy has received the final set of guidance from OfQUAL and the DfE.

Since 5 January, staff and students have followed the remote learning policy, which has been placed online. During the last lockdown, there was a high disparity between different schools in the quality of lessons and the work required of students. The government therefore mandated a number of hours per day and an amount of work that must be completed each week. ATA have 98% engagement from students – with only one student who has

not engaged at all over the last two weeks. DMI told the Board that students are therefore in a strong position when compared with their peers in other schools.

ATA have run a mock exam week this week for Year 12 and Year 13 students, which has proved to be very successful and the students have taken this very seriously.

ATA have had only one case so far of a student cheating by copying and pasting answers which was detected quickly. DMI advised the Board that he is very pleased with the commitment from Year 12 and 13 students.

ATA will be running a similar experience for Year 10's, which will begin on 8 March.

At the moment, between 60-80 vulnerable students and students whose parents are critical workers attend the Academy each day, which is more than we welcomed in the first lockdown. It is a good number for ATA and the students have good support from staff.

DW asked the Board if there are any questions around the topics that DMI has covered so far and there were no questions at this time.

DMI attached summaries for the survey which was undertaken for students in Years 7, 8, 9 and 10. This was a wellbeing survey designed to find out how the students have been coping during the lockdown. The feeling is good and the responses from the students were good. Form tutors have still been running their form time activities each morning with their students but in a more informal manner and the feedback has been good.

DMI advised the Board that ATA have had no complaints about any aspect of the remote learning policy. In fact, the only thing that ATA has received is positive emails from parents - around 30 plus emails saying thank you. The overall feeling is positive.

Staff have been in regular contact with vulnerable and ARC students and the majority of them have been in the Academy and working with their key workers. The Speech and Language Therapist has also visited to support these students.

In terms of staff, three members of staff will begin their maternity leave next term and ATA have made temporary appointments to replace them. DMI did mention to the Board that there was a noticeable increase in the number of good quality candidates for each role advertised and wonders if there has been a surge in people wanting to train to be a teacher.

DMI advised the board that he has included a brief report from RJP about the finances of the Academy and the continuing deficit as well as the accessibility of FSM vouchers for parents. DMI advised that Wandsworth have set up a system for the parents to receive the vouchers directly from them.

DMI shared a presentation with the Board that was based on the government announcement which was made the night before the meeting and would be keen to have their feedback. The overview showed that schools are required to reopen from 8 March 2021 in a similar way to the reopening of schools in September. For ATA, the structure of the school day will remain the same, the risk assessment will be updated accordingly, the system of controls will not change but there will be two additions – regular LFD testing and the requirement to wear a face covering when inside the building.

The Risk assessment has already been updated to reflect the two additions to the controls in place. ATA will operate the same set up for the students where they will report to their designated spaces outside each morning and they will follow the one-way system at all times. Form groups will line up and be collected and taken to lessons. Staff members will be at their classroom doors during lesson changeover to regulate movement in the corridors.

The response to infections has not changed. The student or staff members and their household are required to isolate from the first symptom. If a test is negative, the student/ staff member can return to the Academy and the household can return to normal. However, if their test is positive, they and their household are required to isolate for 10 days. We have to isolate the students and staff who have been in close contact with someone who tests

positive 48 hours before the first symptom inform the DfE.

Attendance will be mandatory again and schools will follow existing guidelines for students who refuse to attend school. ATA can reassure parents and students that there are sufficient control measures to accommodate a full return safely.

The Government has said that schools should offer every student an LFD test. The students will be tested three times with three to five days between each test. ATA have to test 1350 students three times in seventeen days and have a plan to achieve this. The first three tests will be taken in school and then students will be given a home test kit, which they will have to take twice per week and upload their results to a DfE website. The tests are voluntary and ATA cannot discriminate against students who refuse to take a test. ATA will make contact with parents and encourage them to ensure their child takes a test but the Academy cannot insist on their child taking the test.

ATA have 18 members of staff who have been vaccinated so far but up till now no other information from Wandsworth has been received about teaching staff in general being offered vaccinations. .

DMI advised that ATA have three gyms, which will be used as the testing site. ATA is able to accommodate three students every 10 minutes which will allow 450 students to be tested per day. By keeping the numbers low and creating a high level of control from staff to support the students, it will eradicate any potential issues and provide the correct support to students who are struggling with the test. ATA students will not return to lessons on 8 March but will instead be given an appointment time for the 8, 9, or 10 March. Students who have a negative result will return to face to face lessons on Thursday 11 March, which means that every student who returns will have tested negative.

The Year 10s have not been included in the testing schedule from 8 March because they will complete a mock examination week at home. Year 10 students without a quiet space at home will be invited into the Academy to sit their mocks in the Academy.

Students who are receiving their second and third test will be given an appointment time during the day.

DMI asked the Board if there are any questions. DMI advised the Board that he will write to the parents at the end of the week with this information and the Board had no questions.

DW said that this had been a very detailed presentation and asked how the information will be communicated to parents. DMI advised that he will provide written communication this week and next week and staff will run two assemblies with the students. One assembly will include the recording of the route they take when arriving and will be well communicated also to the parents.

DW said that would it be good to offer a presentation to the parents online. DW suggested to DMI a live event so the parents can see the presentation.

Overall, the Academy day will remain the same with a staggered departure.

The Curriculum will continue to provide students with their full entitlement, apart from games, in the first week. Thereafter, games lessons will be outside with systems in place for the students whilst the gyms are in use.

ATA has done a lot of work to address the time that students have missed from being in the Academy and to address the negative message in the press around remote learning, which is unnecessary and unhelpful for the students.

The curriculum will reflect that the students have been learning remotely for a period of time and will be adapted to help the students recapture misunderstandings or missed knowledge over a period of time and in a sustainable way. ATA will continue to identify students who are underperforming or require additional support.

DW addressed the Board and asked if they endorsed the approach. DW congratulated the approach taken by the Academy and all Board members were in agreement.

6. Current Topics for discussion

a. Technology and IT 2021 to 2022 (Matt Gallagher - MGA)

MGA presented to the Board the details of the Technology and ICT curriculum at Key Stage 3. MGA is in the early stages of preparing the timetable for 2022 but some decisions around IT will have an impact.

Computing at Key Stage 3 forms part of ATA's pledge to provide a full curriculum with Technology. Currently, Technology is delivered through a multi-disciplinary carousel involving IT, Food Technology and textiles.

Computing is a separate subject on the timetable. However, in order to maintain this, the Academy does need to take on an additional teacher of computing which is currently a very difficult area for recruitment.

Currently, a significant proportion of these lessons are being and taught by non-specialist teachers with the support of the Curriculum Manager for Creative Technologies who is an IT specialist. This is not an ideal situation and the strong preference would be for a fully trained IT specialist to deliver these lessons. However, there have been 6 rounds of advertisements and we have yet to find a suitably trained professional.

ATA does need to recruit someone who can drive the IT-related curriculum so it reflects the needs of the students and they can better understand the skills which COVID has highlighted are necessary in the digital world. Students can code well but when it comes to more office-based software, there is a need for the Academy to do more. If ATA are unsuccessful in recruiting someone, ATA could continue with the current model but rather than using current members of staff, ATA could redeploy interested members of the Maths department who also have a good knowledge of IT. If that is not possible (demand in Maths require these staff members), ATA could run IT as part of the carousel which includes Food Technology and DT. The number of lessons would drop.

PED recalled that the carousel has been tried before and asked about its success. DMI answered and said it was successful in so far as it exposed students to key concepts but time limitations resulted in less content being delivered. That being said, there continued to be a huge interest in Computing and IT at GCSE (120 students opting for one of the two subjects).

DW wondered if there would be an opportunity to use staff who are not trained teachers but with a good IT knowledge - possibly even volunteers from company backgrounds who could offer the school some time after undergoing appropriate briefing.

CCN asked what the main problem with recruiting an IT teacher was. DMI said that Computing graduates are within the top 2% of all earners with some graduates starting at £80K, which causes a problem with recruitment salaries in teaching.

b. 6th Form applications 2021 (Josh Hetherington - JHE)

JHE gave an overview of the number of Sixth Form applications for courses starting in 2021. ATA have had a healthy number of applicants who have applied to study at the Academy. This includes a higher number of internal students than the past two years and higher numbers of external students than the past three years. JHE explained that as Sixth Form admissions events e.g. Open Evening, Open Morning, school tours have been unable to go ahead in person, staff have developed virtual events which have been received positively by applicants.

Staff involved with admissions are mindful that students will be awarded Teacher Assessed Grades this year and this increases the importance of the guidance applicants are given regarding course choices.

The additional teaching time for Year 12 students commences from this September. This forms part of our switch from four to three A-Levels and this has been seen as an advantage by applicants in light of lost face-to-face teaching time.

CCN raised with DMI that the Board has not been informed about destinations for last year. DMI advised that we

can certainly report the destinations but we could not publish the results.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

DW thanked colleagues for attending and their continued support. Although a compromise, he felt that the virtual meeting format was working well.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 21/04/2021