

**MINUTES OF THE 143rd MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
WEDNESDAY 13 OCTOBER 2021 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 Brannagan (RB), Jennifer Calvert (JCA), Michael Collins (MCO)

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 Zoom. Apologies for absence came from Tony Bothwell (TB) due to connectivity issues and Kevin Chamberlain (KC) due to being on annual leave.

2. Declarations

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

DW referred to the previous minutes and asked for an update on A level results in August and appeals made by students who were not happy with their results. DMI confirmed he would be updating the Board on these points in his report.

DW also asked about the students who couldn't enrol in the 6th form because their results did not meet the entry criteria. Likewise, DMI confirmed that he will also update the Board in his report.

DMI confirmed he will also update the Board on this Year's 7 admissions process.

The minutes of the last meeting held on 14 July 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

The appointment of the Chair and Vice-Chair took place. DW and AEE had been nominated and they agreed to continue in their current roles of Chair and Vice-Chair of the Executive Board.

5. Current topics for discussion

DMI advised the Board that he would like to cover Item 1 and Item 3 from the current topics for discussion first.

Ofsted feedback (DMI and JCA)

DMI spoke about the OFSTED inspection. He explained that the feedback he received is confidential and could be subject to change during OFSTED's quality assurance process. DMI told colleagues that he had hoped to receive the draft report by the time of the meeting but does hope to receive it by the end of the week.

DMI gave colleagues a broad overview of the inspection.

OfQUAL statement on exams (DMI)

DMI explained to the Board that OfQUAL has produced two documents on the subject of next year's exams. One document outlines the modifications exam boards will make to the content of the exams to help mitigate the impact of two periods of lockdown. A separate document will be produced by OfQual on 7 February which will stipulate the content of exams. Once this is available, ATA will instruct the students on exactly what will feature in their exams and focus on these topics for A level, AS and GCSE. However, there is the potential that the French speaking exams will not take place and the English speaking element will be treated differently this year. Schools know that field work will not be assessed in Geography and that in both History and Geography the papers will have an element of choice for students. In English Literature, there will also be an element of choice.

The other, a consultation document, outlines the contingency arrangements that OfQUAL will put in place, should next year's exams not take place. DMI felt confident, however, that the general feeling is that exams will take place next year.

The IB exams will also run; however, the method by which internally assessed work is collated and sent to the IBO for external marking will be the same as was this year.

Appeals

ATA received three stage one appeals from students who wished for ATA to review the data that was used to arrive at their grade in one subject each. ATA responded to each one of those students and confirmed that the evidence used was correct and that there was no change to the grades they were awarded in the subjects they had appealed. Two students progressed to Stage Two, which is an appeal to the exam board. In both cases, the exam board upheld both of the decisions and the grades were not changed.

Coronavirus

Twenty ATA students tested positive for Coronavirus this week. With the infection rate on the increase locally, this is to be expected, and worth noting a relatively low number percentage wise.

6. Principal's Report

DMI spoke to the Board about the Academy's Strategic Plan, which included a detailed Safeguarding Report, which was in addition to the normal safeguarding information that the Board sees at the end of each term. This is because Keeping Children Safe in Education (2021) has been updated for this year to reflect the recommendations in OFSTED's review into sexual harassment in schools. The report demonstrates the way in which ATA has restructured to respond more efficiently to the increase in student referrals.

DW asked if there are more issues at home or if students have more knowledge and therefore feel more confident to disclose issues of a safeguarding nature. DMI explained that it was probably a bit of both. ATA staff do speak with students a lot about safeguarding so there is a culture of openness and trust. In addition, the safeguarding file for the Year 7 cohort is significantly larger this year than it has been in previous years.

DMI explained the staff training and the support measures that are in place at the Academy - because it is not just the safeguarding team who receive disclosures. However, they are the ones who coordinate the intervention based on the information received. The report details the changes made to keeping Children Safe

in Education (2021) and peer on peer abuse. ATA has a policy of dealing with things immediately because early intervention is key.

ATA has noticed that over the two lockdowns, students have spent more time online and are more dependent on their devices. Consequently, issues are happening more online as they are unregulated interactions.

The response to peer on peer abuse, which has been a large team effort, empowers students to call out poor behaviour and report the behaviour to staff.

The training programme with ICAS mentors has been very intensive. The final session was excellent and has helped the mentors to support the students effectively.

The enhanced pastoral curriculum is being led by LSA (Curriculum Manager for RS and Social Sciences) and a low-level concern document has been introduced for staff to follow, if they see a colleague who is struggling or a member of staff in a difficult situation, it allows them to speak to a member of LG.

DMI will circulate the Safeguarding Policy to the Board. DW asked the Board to read at least Part one of the statutory guidance which is referred to in the policy as school governors are expected to have read it.

DW asked if the board had any questions.

Testing

As was the case in March, ATA tested every student in Year 7 to Year 13 at the start of the new academic year. Students were tested twice on site and then provided with LFD tests kits so they could then test twice weekly at home.

ATA tested every student in Year 7 to Year 11 on the first day of return and five students tested positive. These were confirmed with five PCR tests and those students isolated. The second on-site test did not produce any positive cases.

RB commented that the LFD tests can give a false negative result and the PCR can give then give a positive result, so these tests are not entirely reliable.

DMI is pleased that the new Year 7 cohort and Year 12 cohort have started really well, which is very positive. The external students in Year 12 are very good and the new Year 7 students are excellent considering that their induction was quite different to that in previous years.

ATA has recruited 14 Early Careers Teachers who have also made a very positive start and the training they are currently receiving is excellent.

Bicycles

DMI received notification of a critical tweet about the fact that bikes are banned at the Academy. This tweet generated some local and national press interest. The tweet was posted by a parent of a year 7 student. The parent who posted the tweet has since met with DMI and JCA who explained the Academy's Policy on bikes.

DMI told the Board that one of our former students was knocked down recently at the junction of the A3 and Portinscale Road, which reconfirms the Academy's stance on bikes and the need to protect students from harm on the very busy roads around the Academy. AEE and DMI were also keen to point out that the vast majority of students walk to and from the Academy which is in and of itself a sustainable way to travel and is also a sociable way to travel because students walk with their friends.

DMI asked the Board if they had any comments about this policy.

The Board agreed that it wasn't safe for students to ride a bike to school but asked if the wording can be re-ordered so that bikes do not feature in the same category in school rules as illegal substances and weapons. DMI confirmed that this would happen.

Other matters

The Academy's extra-curricular clubs and trips are now operating again. These take place during the school day and at the end of the school day with 84 clubs in total operating.

ATA has had its first formal trip with Year 9 students visiting the Globe Theatre for a performance of A Mid-Summer Nights Dream. DMI was delighted that the trip to the Globe was a success and with staff participation in clubs.

DMI discussed the Accident and Exclusion reports which were short. DMI asked the Board if they had any questions.

The board asked if more explanation could be given 'to bringing the Academy into disrepute'.

DMI discussed Appendix 4 with the Board which was the safeguarding report containing the increasing numbers of staff to the safeguarding team. There has been a significant increase in the safeguarding cases with more children experiencing issues at home.

Financial Summary

RJP summarised the end of year finances for 2021 and ATA had incurred a likely deficit of around 3% in terms of expenditure exceeding income, but this is yet to be finalised due to any last-minute adjustments before the accounts are produced and audited.

It had been originally forecast that there would be an overspend this year of around £670K but ATA will still have spent in the order of £400k more than what has been received. ATA has healthy reserve at present to meet deficits and the shortfall has been minimised by COVID due to costs that ATA has not incurred, like exams and pre-exam revision weeks, exam invigilation costs and caretaker overtime services.

The staffing costs are now around 90% of ATA's overall budget which is a situation reflecting that most targeted additional income from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) goes on staff costs. A 10% increase in staff costs last year was exceptional but predicted.

The end of year external audit is due to begin mid-November and updated final outcomes will be brought to the FRC in December. Once signed off, approved and submitted, the final year-end accounts will be notified to the Executive Board. ATA's budget forecast return to the ESFA has been submitted, which includes a three-year financial forecast. A five-year forecast will be presented at the Annual Trustees Meeting in November and once approved will go to the FRC for their information.

DW suggested that at some point it would be useful to have a meeting with RJP and DMI about how the ratio between costs of teaching staff and associated staff was affected by in-house provision for areas such as cleaning and catering. He was not suggesting any change to provision but in view of the growing trend to compare schools (sometimes critically) by various ratios, it would be useful to do an exercise to count some supporting staff out of this particular ratio where many schools would contract out services and incur no staff headcount.

7. Current Topics for discussion continued

DMI submitted the ATA COVID-19 Risk Assessment which reflects the government guidance and asked the Board if they had any comments. The Chairman had already been through it with some comments incorporated. The Board were all in agreement with the updates and endorsed the latest risk assessment

Strategic Plan (DMI and JCA)

The Strategic plan was shared with the Ofsted inspector in draft form as it had not been ratified by the Executive Board and he was accepting that it was also the start of the academic year. DMI had revised the document thoroughly and made the changes showing the experiences ATA had learned over the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomed discussion on any changes to the document. DMI asked the Board to read through the document and send any comments or changes they may have through to DMI.

PED asked what process is in place for managing the achievement of the different objectives and how the Academy measures this and whether a separate document sits behind the Strategic Plan that performs this role. DMI told PED he is happy to produce a backup document but this is a work in process. DW asked if a document can be created and shared with the Board at appropriate stages to show what has been achieved from the plan.

8. Any other business

PED asked when the vaccines were taking place for the students which DMI confirmed are happening on 5 November for 12 to 15-year olds and how the consent documents have been managed by the NHS. DMI confirmed that he had sent a letter to the parents of Year 7 to Year 11 that covered all aspects on this.

CCN asked the numbers of students ATA have vaccinated although DMI did not have the exact numbers, he believed that student take up was high.

There was no other business.

DW thanked colleagues for attending and their continued support.

Signed: _____

Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 24 / 01 / 2021