

In confidence

BCB(16)3rd meeting

Tuesday 17 May 2016

MINUTES

Present

Usha Prashar Acting Chair
Janet Beer
Deborah Bronnert
Gareth Bullock
Rohan Gunatillake
Howell James
Oliver Laird
Kirsty Lang
Ros Marshall
Martin Roth
Tom Thomson

In attendance

Ciarán Devane, Chief Executive
Jo Beall, Director Education & Society
Hilary Cross, Director Strategy & Engagement
Kate Ewart-Bigg, Director Global Network
Adrian Greer, Chief Operating Officer
Andrew Horton, Director Digital, Partnerships & Innovation
Helen Murley, Director HR
Mark Robson, Director English
Graham Sheffield, Director Arts
Caroline Stockmann, Chief Financial Officer
Alison Coutts, Secretary

1. Apologies for absence & declarations of interest

James Cronin, Alan Shannon and David Verey had sent apologies for their absence.

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 22nd March 2015 and matters arising

All matters arising from the meeting had been actioned or were scheduled for a future meeting.
The Minutes were approved.

3. Chief Executive's Report

Ciarán noted that the Chair Designate had called into some of our offices overseas whilst on visits for Visit Britain, including attending part of Going Global in South Africa. Colleagues had really appreciated this and commented on his enthusiasm and engagement.

Ciarán updated Trustees on the Comprehensive Spending Review settlement. *Information in this section has been removed as it is exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is “likely to prejudice the effective conduct of public affairs” as defined in Section 36 (Prejudice to the effective conduct of public affairs) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.*

He also referred to our position on the EU. The Board agreed that it is important that the British Council has a position in terms of the impact of the EU on our cultural relations mission.

Ciarán noted that Shakespeare Lives continues to go well and we have feedback from across the world that tells us it is being well-received.

He asked Jo to give an overview of the Going Global Conference in South Africa. Trustees agreed that it had been a real highlight and an example of the British Council at its best. They noted that the right mix of people were in attendance, the content was exceptional and the quality of debate had been really high. They agreed that convening an external regional steering committee to advise on the planning during the year leading up to the event had really added value and that it will be important to review lessons learned from the whole experience to inform the planning of next year’s Going Global conference in London.

4. Chief Operating Officer’s report

Adrian informed the Board that the anticipated financial outturn is consistent with the picture presented at the last meeting of Trustees.

Information in this section has been removed as it is exempt from disclosure on the grounds that it is “likely to prejudice the commercial interests” of either the British Council or another party as defined under Section 43 (Commercial interests) of the Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Adrian informed the Board of a potential fraud that has just been discovered. It relates to procurement and is currently being investigated.

Caroline updated the Board on progress on the annual accounts. She confirmed that subject to NAO’s work we are on track to meet the deadline.

Adrian then referred the Board to the 6 monthly HR snapshot.

5. Report from Audit & Finance Committee (A&FC)

Tom Thomson reported back on behalf of David.

He noted that the A&FC was generally assured that the work on end of year accounts was on track.

He said that the A&FC had reviewed the Financial Transparency project and that as it is such a large and critical project it will be a standing item for the A&FC’s agenda. Oliver Laird had agreed to be the link with the executive on this between A&FC meetings and the A&FC has asked to be alerted immediately if the project goes off track.

He confirmed that the A&FC had endorsed the request for the write-off. They had also discussed trapped cash and want to monitor plans for managing this.

He noted that the Committee had reviewed the plan for managing the approach and contribution to the Goddard Inquiry and had been satisfied the organisation is dealing with this effectively.

6. Any other business

Usha informed the Board that there will be a Board Effectiveness Review in the autumn. Trustees agreed that the timing works well in terms of providing feedback to the new Chair.

Usha reported on her visit to South Africa during which she had attended the final meeting of the external organising committee for ZA Connect and then the press conference. She noted that during the latter there were some remarkable testimonies from the floor on how it had impacted and she'd met many senior contacts who had been very impressed. Trustees agreed that this highlighted the importance of joint festivals, and that they can have a transformative role in building self-esteem amongst artists and creatives more generally as they give them a platform.

Usha then paid tribute to Howell James for whom this was his last meeting after a 6 year term. Trustees agreed that Howell had made an outstanding contribution to the Board of Trustees and would be greatly missed. They wished him well and asked him to stay in touch.

There was no other business and the meeting ended at 13.00.

Summary of action points arising

Updated from previous meetings

(01)4	Bring economic modelling for review via A&FC	2016
(03)3	Include a session on headcount and what good looks like	2016
(03)4	Include a session on EO&D targets, particularly on race	2016
(01)5	GIS – come back to the Board with a timeline/milestones	By email
(03)4	Develop the English strategy with contributions from Janet, Ros, David and Gareth before bringing back to the Board next year	2016
(04)7	Update the risk format to provide a 3 year projection	2016
(05)4	Include an update from the Contracts Committee in the annual agenda	2016
(02)4	Next version of surplus growth plan to go to A&FC before board	2016
(02)5	Identify an external expert to advise on capital funding	May 2016