

**MINUTES OF THE 144th MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
THURSDAY 9 DECEMBER 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), Patricia Edmondson (PED), 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 Zoom. Apologies for absence came from Tony Bothwell (TB) due to connectivity issues, Kevin Chamberlain (KC) due to personal commitments, Stewart Harris (SH) due to personal commitments and Cristina Carli Nonnato (CCN) due to work commitments.

2. Declarations

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

DW referred to the previous minutes and asked if DMI would be providing a more comprehensive report of Ofsted's feedback. DMI confirmed that he would provide this in his report.

DW asked about the new Coronavirus updates and their impact on the Academy. DMI confirmed that he would update the Board with this information in his report and that he would also include any additional updates that had been received since producing his report.

DW highlighted from the financial summary, the ratio between teaching staff and associate staff. The reason why the total number of associate staff is comparatively large when compared to many schools may not be realised by external readers. A key contributor to this ratio is the in-house provision of services which are contracted out by many schools.

DW raised the strategic plan and asked if the Board had read through the document and had sent any comments or changes to DMI.

PE had asked previously about the processes in place for managing the achievement of the objectives in the strategic plan, and DW noted that DMI's report contains a response.

The minutes of the last meeting held on 12 October were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

No matters arising.

5. Principal's Report

Critical Incident

DMI shared with the Board details of a critical incident that had taken place at the Academy recently involving an aggressive parent who gave cause for concern for both students and staff. DMI reassured the Board that the incident had been dealt with swiftly by staff and police intervention.

Ofsted

DMI provided a more in-depth report from the Ofsted inspection with more detailed feedback. Much of this was provided verbally at the time of the inspection, but was not included in the final report because reports from Ofsted are now more summarised in nature. He talked colleagues through the feedback provided by the inspection team on each of the core curriculum areas and confirmed that the inspection team had been very complimentary on all aspects of the Academy's provision, which, of course, was reflected in the grading of outstanding on all the sections of the inspection.

DW also provided the Board with the details of the discussion that he had with the inspectors about operation and involvement of the Executive Board.

Teacher training/UCAS

DMI advised the board that MGA would present the progress made against early careers framework, which is an in-house programme that ATA has in place to train newly qualified teachers.

DMI told the Board that JHE would speak about UCAS. JHE has revised the UCAS process in the Academy, which has had an impact on the number of students who secure a place at their first choice university.

Testing

DMI told the Board that the Government's various recent COVID-related announcements had not had a material impact on the guidance that has been given to schools. Schools were advised a couple of weeks ago to consider testing all students and the recommendation from the government is that all schools should test every child when they return from the Christmas break. There is also a strong desire that children should wear face masks in communal areas in schools.

DMI told the Board that ATA has a plan in place for LFD testing all the students on their return from the Christmas break. The students' published return date is 5 January 2022. However, students will return to the Academy on 4 January, which is the day before lessons are scheduled to start and is also the professional development day for staff. All students will be tested in one day and any student who tests positive will be required isolate and take a confirmatory PCR test.

Students will have to take a second LFD test four days later. In the past, the first two or three LFD tests had to be taken on site; however, students will now take subsequent tests at home and they will be provided with kits for home-testing.

Face Coverings

The government 'strongly recommends' face coverings in all communal areas of schools. While ATA will continue to encourage students and staff to wear face coverings, this will not be made mandatory. ATA is continuing to operate the one-way system, which means that very few students are inside for any great length of time, other than when they are in a classroom. ATA has re-established social distancing rules. It has suspended the practice of lining up outside of classrooms, so that students do not congregate in narrow spaces, and members of staff who work in close contact with a student will be required to wear a mask. Students will also have to wear a mask when engaging in activities that require face-to-face contact or close contact.

ATA has limited the number of meetings held on site. If a parent meeting can be organised on TEAMS, this will be

the preferred method, but if there is something that needs to be discussed which would benefit from a face-to-face conversation, this will be arranged on-site. All of the peripatetic teachers who work with children at the Academy, and the therapeutic care providers and care workers who regularly support children at the Academy, will be allowed to attend the Academy but will be required to wear a face mask at all times.

Student attendance

DMI reported the most recent student attendance figures. The DfE reports attendance in two ways: isolation as a present mark and isolation as an absence mark. In both cases, ATA is between five and six points above the national average for attendance. ATA does not have many children who are isolating and has been relatively unaffected by COVID-related absence.

The parents have been very supportive. If a student shows any COVID symptoms, parents keep the student at home, they arrange for a PCR test and return the student once they have received a negative PCR result or completed the (current) mandatory 10-day isolation period.

Staff Attendance

Staff attendance has been very strong at the Academy but in the last three weeks there has been a sudden dip, which is predominantly amongst associate staff who are supporting children in classes and therefore in close contact with the students.

GCSE, AS level, A2 level and International Baccalaureate exams

DMI told the board that he is very hopeful that exams will go ahead this year and looks forward to reading the guidance from OFQUAL, which will be published on 7 February and which will contain the approved content for all exams. ATA is preparing the students for final exams but should the exams not go ahead, contingency arrangements are in place and being followed.

Year 11s will sit their last mock exam tomorrow and the results and feedback from these mock exams will be used to design the curriculum for Year 11 from January onwards. A huge amount of information is learnt from the mock exams and teachers will make sure that the students are in a strong position for the exam season. Students in Year 11 have not sat an exam, and neither have they observed another year group sitting an exam. Consequently, they have not experienced the build-up to an exam.

Year 12 and year 13s have been incredibly stoic because they have not sat an exam either. The Year 13's were prepared for and at the point of sitting their GCSE exams two years ago so have at least benefited from the build-up then and should remember that sense of pressure around the exams. Year 12 and 13 students will sit a second mock in each subject at the end of January.

Extra-curricular activities

DMI was pleased to report to the Board on the uptake of the extra-curricular activities. Year 7 and Year 8 students have not previously experienced extracurricular activities at the Academy. The uptake is incredibly high and there are a number of sporting fixtures taking place now with healthy competition between each of the local schools.

Accident Report

The Board confirmed there were no areas for concern by them in the accident report.

Exclusion Report

The exclusion report contains a higher number of exclusions than normal. The reason for this is that there were two significant incidents that involved a number of students. The students involved were all excluded on a fixed-term basis.

DW asked if any of the Board had have any questions on the report.

Staff recruitment

DMI informed the Board that the Curriculum Manager for Science will be taking maternity leave from the end of April but will be at the Academy up to the exam season or as close to the exams as possible. ATA is running an internal process to appoint a temporary Curriculum Manager and DMI will inform the Board of the outcome.

6. Current Topics for discussion

1. Early Career Framework - ATA training programme (MGA)

MGA presented the Board with an update on the Early Career's Framework (ECF). This is a new programme that is specifically for new entrants to the profession and not simply for new teachers to the Academy. Historically, the induction period for newly qualified teachers has been for one-year but from this year it is a requirement that all schools provide a two-year induction and training programme for newly qualified teachers.

Schools were given the choice on how to deliver the ECF and ATA decided to create its own bespoke programme. ATA is very happy with the strength of its brand and its experience in delivering outstanding professional development from which the ECF programme has been designed for its large cohort of 15 Early Careers teachers (ECTs).

The Academy has 'signed-up' to an appropriate body which verifies the progress the ECTs are making. MGA reported that he has met with each of the ECTs and their mentors to discuss the two terms that they have completed. MGA was pleased that the feedback from everyone had been incredibly positive. The ECT's are very positive in terms of the support that they have received from the Academy and of the way in which the programme has helped them develop as a teacher. The appropriate body was also pleased with progress so far.

DMI asked the Board if they had any comments, which there were none.

2. 6th Form applications and UCAS progress (JHE)

JHE presented to the Board about the Year 13s UCAS process. There are a number of different metrics that can be used but JHE focussed on the number of students progressing to Russell Group universities and to Oxbridge because those are two of the most common metrics used. ATA has a very strong upward trajectory in the proportion of students moving to Russell Group universities.

Over the last two years, ATA has made some changes to the UCAS process and JHE outlined these changes to the Board. JHE presented a timeline of a UCAS applicant form. ATA has changed the deadline for all students, which is now the October half-term. This is two months earlier than it was three years ago. This allows the students to be tactical with their university choices. When the students are applying for a place at a university, they are able to name up to five preferences.

Students can apply for two choices, when they apply early, and once students have received their first offers in November and December they can use these offers to inform their choice of 3rd, 4th and 5th preferences. This approach has helped to boost the number of students who are receiving an offer from a Russell Group University.


The Year 11 progression into the sixth form continues to be positive and ATA is the first choice for ATA students - 83% of students applied to join the Sixth Form last year. Last year, ATA received the highest number of external applicants over the past five years, which was superb, and applications are looking equally positive at this point.

ATA has seen the return of face-to-face consultations and Sixth Form events, which has been helpful in encouraging external students because ATA has been able to invite students to the Academy and show them everything that ATA has to offer.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

DW thanked colleagues for attending and their continued support. He apologised for his own IT connection problems in using TEAMS during the meeting.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 30/3/2022