

**MINUTES OF THE 101st FINANCE AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE MEETING
HELD AT ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
THURSDAY 09 JULY AT 16.15PM**

Present: Dick Whitcutt (DW) - Chair, Richard Perry (RJP), Douglas Mitchell (DMI), Stewart Harris (SH),
Angela Entwistle (AEE), Rachel Branagan (RB) Kevin Chamberlain (KC)

In Attendance: Jane Kiddell (JKD) (Minutes)

Start Time: 16.15PM (via Zoom)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies were passed on from TB who could not attend due to WIFI restrictions.

2. Declaration of interest

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

No matters arising

5. Capital Developments

RJP confirmed that ATA had still not been able to appoint an external IT Adviser due to Covid-19. RJP will update the Committee at the next FRC Meeting. DW had advised that he thought it would be useful to appoint an external person to provide a fresh perspective on the IT Systems and infrastructure at ATA and RJP confirmed the IT Department would welcome it.

RJP advised the Committee that ATA had received quotations from six companies for the replacement to the IT Storage Area Network (SAN). CISCO and Dell were left out of the comparison because the figures that these very large companies quoted were 3 to 4 times more expensive than other quotes received. The smaller IT businesses were more keen. ATA have been able to keep the costs down as it does not require as much storage as has been required in the past because more cloud-based storage is available.

There are two ways in which data can be stored. One is referred to as a Flash Drive and the other referred to as Hybrid. Flash Drives use solid state disks where data is stored sequentially or logically and Hybrid accommodates data stored on old-style spinning disks. Although the Flash drive is the preferred option by the IT department the additional cost implications were not fully merited and those for the Hybrid option are more competitive.

RJP talked the FRC through the comparison table for tenders submitted by the four remaining companies. The majority of the prices for the Hybrid were very similar. The Committee agreed to select the cheapest quote from CMC quoted at £28 697 for the SAN, although ATA have not used CMC before the IT Department are more than happy to work with them.

RJP advised that the building contractors are half way through the refurbishment works, which are required to accommodate the increase in student numbers. ATA were pleased with the contractors that had been selected. However, a delay in sign-off necessarily delayed that start of the project. The works therefore started slightly later than expected. The works commenced on the 1st week after the May holiday and have gone exceptionally well. The project is now ahead of the stated completion date of 21 August.

Communication with the Site Manager for the project has been good and the quality of the refurbishment works appears to be very good. The Site Manager is very effective and the communication with ATAS's Building Services has been regular. The refurbishment works are starting to take shape: Zone C should be ready by 17 July and this will hopefully allow the Academy to move furnishings back in straight away. The new art rooms - where SEN was situated - will be ready the week after. The spaces vacated by the former art rooms and in Zone F are approaching completion. This means that all areas should be ready for at least partial access by end of July/1st week in August, although the project team are waiting for some steelwork to be agreed. However, RJP does not see this as an issue.

DW asked if the original cost of the project has reduced. RJP explained that the anti-graffiti paint had not been built into the cost of the project as the contractors obtained a cost for this piece of work, which was submitted to Wandsworth but was expensive. Wandsworth asked ATA to make a contribution towards the cost; however, ATA already work with a company which will supply and apply the anti-graffiti paint at half the price the contractors quoted. Wandsworth were pleased that ATA could do this and are therefore no longer seeking an additional contribution from ATA.

Some of the refurbishment works require several curriculum areas to relocate so that student movement, timetabling and rooming can happen more effectively. These moves will also ensure that there will be a Curriculum Manager on every corridor to oversee their subject areas.

6. Revenue Funding – 2019-20 Update

RJP updated the FRC with the summary funding statement for the year to date, up to and including 31 May 2020, together with a more detailed income and expenditure analysis. Total expenditure at that point amounted to £7,452K, which represents 76.4% of the estimated income for the year. ATA was slightly higher in terms of percentage spend at this stage when compared to the previous year, which had been expected. DW pointed out that the comparison sheet needed a heading amendment (from End of Year to Year to Date).

Appendix A outlined a number of assumptions that have been made in relation to the likely outturn figures, including other income headings where ATA trip funding, catering and trading company profits have been reduced due to Covid-19. Other adjustments to costs were explained to the Board, including saved costs on exam invigilation and fees and caretaker overtime payments due to their non-attendance at weekends since lockdown.

The impact has been difficult to gauge, but the deficit at the year-end would hopefully be reduced by 40% from an estimated £560 to £335K, but these figures are very raw and not to be taken as fully informed. ATA continue to receive full grant funding from the ESFA and salary payments to staff and to suppliers on annual maintenance contracts are continuing in full.

RJP advised that some schools had claimed that they have incurred extra costs, but ATA have made savings during the Coronavirus Pandemic.

DMI explained that the extra costs that other schools mentioned are the same costs ATA have incurred, but the Academy has made savings elsewhere to off-set these unexpected costs. ATA has made savings on printing as most of the work since the end of March has been completed online and further costs would have been occurred had the Academy been on site. SMHW is tailor-made as a platform for virtual learning and has enabled ATA to save money.

ATA has also made savings on catering with FSM provision and there have not been many students that have taken up the offer of a packed lunch. ATA made it clear to parents that they have not participated in the voucher scheme because it has continued to provide in-house catering. DW asked RJP about ATA's catering staff and if any had been furloughed. RJP explained to the Committee that it has not been able to furlough staff (as a fully funded public sector organisation). A rota has been in place for all non-teaching departments to be on site with the catering staff having worked on a 2 to 3 staff per day rota system. ATA has made a saving on the purchase of catering provisions but has still been required to pay its staff in full as staff are fully employed by ATA and not a contract caterer.

All staff have been willing to come in to the Academy and much prefer to be in the workplace. RJP advised the Committee that ATA have been successful in minimising the number of staff on site at any one time and keeping within the Government guidelines. The cleaning staff have been working their normal hours for the past few weeks; in Network Support there have been 2 staff members on site per day and Building Services staff are all back.

RJP advised that it is difficult to determine specific cost savings the Academy has made as a result of exams not being able to take place. The Exam Boards are yet to let schools know what they will be crediting back.

7. Revenue Funding – 2020-21

Since circulating details regarding expected income next year at the previous meeting, RJP advised the FRC that the government has suggested that there will be an increase in funding for schools next year. ATA may miss out due to most of the expected funding being for building repairs and maintenance, although there may be some movement of the income figures presented last time.

RJP added that normally he would be submitting to the ESFA the Academies Budget Forecast Return. However, this document has been dispensed with this year, but will return next year. He further added that the Academy's Budget Forecast Return 3-Year submission, which would normally require approval at the July FRC meeting has been delayed until the end of September. The ESFA will also dispense with the submission of forecast costs for 2021/22 and 2022/23. ATA will be expected to undertake its own internal financial forecasting and future planning.

RJP advised the Board that he would like to work on it over the summer break and send the completed document to the Board for their comments in early September.

A significant part of the budget is dedicated to staff costs. ATA is still waiting to recruit one teacher and two TLA's. Appendix 2 shows that estimated staff costs have jumped significantly from the current year, with the inclusion, in particular, of more teaching staff to teach the increased student numbers at the Academy. The teaching staff figures have increased from £5.5m to £6.1m. The increase on the current year being due to extra staffing, £165K representing the likely pay award for teachers and £200k increase covering the enhanced ATA Allowance, approved previously.

There is an increase in support staff numbers, with the Medical Welfare Officer now shown fully under support staff costs - having been split with administration costs previously. Network Support also have an apprentice this year who will be appointed on a permanent basis on completion of his apprenticeship (this is not an additional post). ATA will have an increase in TLAs but the Academy has managed to start with a full quota of staff directly employed rather than a number of temporary, agency staff. This has helped to alleviate any additional agency costs and should guarantee greater commitment from the staff who have been appointed.

ATA has seen an increase in the number on EHCP students, which has resulted in a requirement for extra TLAs to help meet the needs of the rising number of students with high needs.

DW asked RJP how the increase in TLA numbers would impact our budget. DW suggested that ATA should seek additional funding if EHCPs required support that extended beyond that which could be achieved with the funding associated with the student. RJP advised that ATA has previously received a larger funding provision from Wandsworth who are struggling with their own funding issues and student high needs provision is one area where they have reduced their support.

Staffing provision is key to enabling ATA to operate successfully and at present the Trustees would wish for ATA to maintain this.

DMI advised that the staffing expenditure may look daunting, but also reminded the Committee that funding for new students is delayed by one year and that, year-on-year, the extra money will work through. It was added that ATA does not envisage the need to increase teacher numbers again the following year.

ATA have found it harder to appoint some new staff this year. Some teaching positions have been difficult to recruit into and appointments have had to be made remotely, which has been somewhat disappointing as ATA cannot promote itself to its full potential, nor can it judge the applicants' teaching abilities in the classroom. ATA have offered a position to five applicants, who initially accepted the position at the Academy but then retracted their acceptance. Unfortunately, there has not been a great deal of loyalty demonstrated by these candidates but this could be because the recruitment process is very different this year.

8. Trading Company

ATA had neither received, nor were expecting, the usual income due to the lockdown in March with both the gyms and Openview closed to external lettings from this point.

9. Administrative and Staffing Matters

RJP advised the Board that administrative matters have been managed to the best of ATA's abilities within the Government Covid-19 guidelines. A risk assessment was produced and provided to all staff which incorporated Government advice and had received approval from both the FRC and Executive Board. This assessment remains active and reviewed at all times. The Leadership Group has worked hard to put measures in place for the reopening of the Academy in September.

The Academy has aimed to keep all staff and students safe and continue to work within the Government guidelines.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 16/10 /2020