

**MINUTES OF THE 141st MEETING OF THE EXECUTIVE BOARD
OF ASHCROFT TECHNOLOGY ACADEMY ON
TUESDAY 27 APRIL 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), Mike Smith (MSM), Jennifer Calvert (JCA)

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. The only absences were Tony Bothwell (TB) due to travel commitments and Kevin Chamberlain (KC) due to work commitments.

2. Declarations

No interests were declared.

3. Minutes of Last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting held on 25 February 2021 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Matters Arising

DW asked DMI if he would update the Board with the arrangements the Academy has in place for testing (LFD and PCR) students. This was discussed at the last meeting and DMI confirmed an update would be provided in his Principal's Report presentation.

ATA has received the final set of guidance for setting this year's examination grades from Ofqual and the DfE. MSM will provide the Board with an update on the arrangements the Academy has in place for setting grades for GCSE, AS level and A level qualifications in his presentation.

However, DMI did say that the way in which the system has been created by the government puts a huge amount of pressure on individual schools and individual teachers. The Academy's strength is that there will be support for every member of staff and ATA has in place comprehensive data so that ATA can be certain that the grades that the students are set are fair and correct (*MSM also outlined this in his subsequent presentation*).

DW asked if there had been any further update regarding Wandsworth Local Authority's proposed Offensive Weapons Protocol for schools. DMI explained that there had not been any update although the next Secondary Head Teachers meeting with the Local Authority was scheduled for 5 May and it would probably come up there again.

DW advised the Board that the second permanent exclusion appeal, which had been heard by the Independent Review Panel, had been overturned. ATA is looking carefully at the reasons behind the decision which had been highlighted by the panel. Both students, subject to review decisions, have now returned to the Academy.

5. Principal's Report

DMI presented his report, which would carry on to embrace presentations from Mike Smith (MSM) and Jennifer Calvert (JCA).

DMI talked through his report, which was shorter than normal as DMI copies to the Board the weekly letters that he sends to parents. These provide a regular update of the Academy's weekly priorities.

DMI told the Board that the report focussed on Covid testing, year-end exam arrangements, which would be presented in more detail by MSM, and the curriculum for 2021, which would be presented by JCA.

ATA staff are in the process of reviewing the curriculum from September 2021 in order to make sure students recover educationally from this period of disruption and that they are able to perform well in their exams in 2022.

Testing

DMI informed the Board that ATA students and their families had been superb in taking part in the weekly testing programme, particularly in the last two weeks after the discovery of the South African variant of the COVID virus.

ATA received the news from Wandsworth that students and families would need to take a PCR test so DMI informed the students and their families straight away (see letter dated 14 April).

ATA were sent 7,600 PCR tests by Wandsworth on Monday 19 April, which were distributed to the students and their families who had not been able to organise a PCR test the week before on Wednesday 21st April. Students returned in the region of 5,500 completed tests the following day.

The exact figure could not be reported as the tests were all returned by 8:30am on Thursday 22 April and by 9:45am they had been packaged up and handed to the courier.

From the PCR tests, ATA reported one positive case. It is unknown if it was the South African variant but the student and their close contacts isolated immediately.

Students will now return to the programme of twice-weekly LFD testing and the students received their next batch of LFD tests so that the home testing can recommence. ATA will continue with this testing programme until the Government guidance changes. The guidance is expected to change on May 17.

ATA are delighted with the number of student test results uploaded each week. These are checked twice a week and although not every family uploads the test results, the results uploaded are all negative.

ATA has received the final set of guidance schools must follow when setting exam grades. ATA has also received the consultation document on the appeals process.

In response, ATA has created a Centre Policy, which was given to the Board for their comment.

All students in Years 11, Year 12 and Year 13 will start their assessment period next week. The majority of students will study at home and attend each day for one or two assessments. The LRC and the Study Area are open and students are booking a place to study in the Academy.

Safeguarding

ATA continues to prioritise the safety of the students both inside and outside of the Academy. As life returns to normality and as students return to the normal rhythm of Academy life, the Academy maintains its culture of vigilance and reports any concerns to Phil Hall (PHA).

As part of this, DMI talked about the nationally publicised case of Sarah Everard, which has exposed a number of concerns over institutional ignorance in relation to sexual abuse in some establishments .

After the incident involving Sarah Everard, a website, entitled Everybody's Invited, was created. This website invited young women to write their testimonials of issues they had experienced at school or at University that they believed had not been dealt with in the correct way.

Consequently, Ofsted have launched an investigation into this issue and are looking to review the safeguarding practices within schools. Ofsted would like to see that safeguarding policies are comprehensive in their protection of all children, particularly girls. They wish to see that systems have been put into place for children to report issues of sexual abuse or sexual aggression and that there is the correct multi agency support from the local authority to help young girls who are experiencing these issues. Ofsted will wish to see that the leadership structure in schools is responsive and will deal with issues in a robust way to make sure that the victim is protected and that the perpetrators are dealt with in a way that then prevents them and others from replicating the same patterns of behaviour.

Ofsted will also look to make sure that the policy for relationship and sex education is comprehensive and that it reflects the most recent challenges that schools have seen nationally. As a result, DMI and PHA have made updates to the Safeguarding Policy, which have been sent to the Board for their approval.

Schools receive guidance each year from the DfE on the information that must be included in a safeguarding policy. ATA's policy is also checked by the Local Authority's Safeguarding Lead to make sure that the policy is fully comprehensive.

In addition to the amendments made to the Safeguarding Policy, Lucy Sargeant (Curriculum Manager for Religious Studies and Social Sciences) spoke to the Board about the Academy's Relationship and Sex Education policy in February. Additional changes have been made to the Schemes of Work to reinforce the identification and communication of any concerns over peer-on-peer abuse.

DMI asked the Board if they had any questions. There were none at this stage.

The Board were happy with the updates made and one change was made. DMI explained that there should be one named person in each school, to whom students would report issues. At ATA, this is PHA as the Designated Safeguarding Lead, but ATA encourages students to speak to any member of staff with whom they feel comfortable and their concerns will be reported to PHA. This is the approach that ATA will continue to promote.

DW said that this is excellent but asked if it also means that ATA has to train or brief staff who are not necessarily teachers on possible safeguarding issues raised with them directly by students. DMI advised the Board that every member of staff, teachers and support staff, take part in regular safeguarding training.

6. Current Topics for discussion

a. The Academy's Centre Policy for determining GCSE, AS-Level and A-Level Grades – MSM

MSM shared a presentation with the Board and took them through the arrangements for setting grades.

MSM outlined the key points ATA has considered and the arrangements that are now in place.

On 4 January, the government announced that exams would not go ahead and it has taken nearly two months for the various exam Boards and government organisations to inform schools of the plan to set grades.

Teachers will now allocate grades. These Grades must be a fair, reasonable and a carefully considered judgment of the evidence that ATA has for each student for each subject and qualification.

It is clear that staff must not think about individual potential or prediction. Nor must teachers imagine how a student might have performed if the pandemic had not happened. Instead, their judgment must be holistic and based on the evidence that they have. The correct processes must be in place to check that the grades awarded are fair and representative of each student's current ability.

DW mentioned that what happens in different schools was in danger of some variation because each school will want to do the best for its students. It is therefore incumbent on all schools to follow the guidance faithfully and make sure that the process enables a fair protocol and unbiased grades. He was sure this would apply at ATA.

MSM said that the government has distributed a lot of documentation about this. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) will check a school's process and the first part of that is the policy that they require all schools to write and upload to their website.

He then talked the Board through a single page guide to the arrangements that ATA have put into place.

ATA's Leadership Group (LG) had spent a lot of time going through the guidance provided. Once the LG had a greater understanding of this, a meeting was held with the Curriculum Managers (CMs) and the Exams Officer.

The CMs discussed this with their departments and provided further refinements. Students will sit tests based on the material that the exams boards have produced. ATA expected new material to be provided by the exam boards but that did not happen, so ATA staff are basing the assessments on past paper questions and some newly formed exam questions (internally produced). Some of the past papers are, in theory, secure, but they have been in schools for a year and if students really want to get hold of a test, they can do so.

DW felt that it would be good to give a presentation to parents about how the process would work, including how appeals would work in the appeals process.

ATA has told the students about the process in assemblies, in lessons and in form time so there has been continual communication about how the process will work.

The first thing the Academy had to do was agree the data that should be used and each department has drawn up a list of evidence that they will use. ATA then prepared an evidence form, which was shared with students. The form contains the performance data ATA has for students and then lists all of the individual sources.

The students have signed a form to say that they recognise and understand the data ATA will use to determine grades and students have had the opportunity to raise any mitigating circumstances, beyond those that have affected all students, before signing the forms.

After the assessments have been sat, staff will need to mark them carefully so that there is consistent marking across each department. Training has been designed to help with this – along with standardisation and moderation exercises in each department.

Once all of the grades are set, they will be sent to MSM for checking against the Academy's performance in 2017, 2018 and 2019.

MSM referred the Board to the Centre Policy document, which outlines the process in detail and asked the Board if there were any questions.

PED asked MSM about the results section and whether parents and guardians have been made aware of the arrangements for results days in August. MSM advised that they will be the week beginning 9th August - A Levels will be on the 10th and GCSEs will be on the 13th. They have been moved forward to allow for appeals and for finalising university places.

PED asked whether the students should come with their parents to sign off the form because the student may have to put in a mitigating circumstance, which they may not have thought of themselves, and sometimes it might require a parent's prompt. DMI advised that it starts with the students and they will be guided through this form. Students

who have continuing concerns after the assessment periods will be invited for individual meetings to talk about mitigating circumstances.

ATA has a contingency in place for students who might be isolating and who might not be able to sit some of the assessments so that the students will still have the opportunity towards the end of May.

DW commented that it would be useful to inform parents that the students will be asked to complete this and if the parents want to guide them as to any extenuating circumstances, and then they would be able to do so.

b) The curriculum plan post-COVID - JCA

JCA advised the Board about the curriculum plan post-COVID from September 2021 and discussed ATA's reaction to the centrally proposed summer school.

JCA explained the background to the Board whereby the government have introduced a fund that can be used to conduct a one-week or two-week summer school for the new Year 7 cohort. Nevertheless, ATA had already been focused on reviewing Schemes of Work and the curriculum content and this process was introduced at the same time the government had released information about summer schools.

ATA is confident that the curriculum can be refined and developed to support students who may have missed certain content. Moreover, ATA's longer school day and in-house interventions, such as study hall, provide greater reassurance that the students will have many opportunities to make better than expected progress.

The optional summer school programme for schools to run is based on Education Endowment Foundation recommendations. This is a charitable group that conducts a great deal of educational research and

the data they draw from is the teaching and learning Toolkit, which the Education Endowment Foundation have created. This looks at the months that can be gained through various interventions and the relative cost of each intervention. For example, a summer school can add 2 months but is a relatively expensive intervention. Whereas feedback is a very low-cost intervention and can add 8 months of learning. While data suggests that the impact of a summer school can be up to 2 months of learning, the summer school programme would have to focus on very specific elements of the curriculum and there would be an expectation that all children attend. In reality, the start of the academic year will be more crucial and a great deal of thought is being given to that so that students are able to begin in the correct way.

Looking at the research from the Education Endowment Foundation, ATA's leadership team has concluded that there are far better interventions that schools can take. One of the areas that has the greatest impact is homework, this can add five months to a student's progress and enhancing the students' progress is the most important thing.

There may be misconceptions that might have been created through the virtual teaching world, which no one can measure because it remains very new. There has been a great deal of discussion within the LG and the staff about what ATA are doing right now and ATA are beginning to start the process of looking forward to what will happen in the next academic year.

The new Year 7 cohort will embark on a five-year programme when they start at ATA. Staff will therefore have the time to make sure that students make significant progress and that the impacts of COVID are therefore limited.

The new Year 7 cohort will have, as every year does, holiday homework to complete and that will help to bridge the gap between Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. The current Year 7s had a very smooth transition from primary to secondary at a time of particular restrictions. While students missed an in-person induction and they seem to be progressing very well.

ATA does not therefore think the one-off intervention of a summer school for the new Year 7 will have a benefit that reduces the impact of the COVID pandemic. ATA is confident that giving teachers and the CMs the opportunity to reflect on their curriculum and assess students' needs will enable ATA to implement interventions that are more purposeful.

CMs will review the curriculum for each year group and start to think about what might be needed to change or be developed to ensure that ATA covers everything that students might have missed.

For example, for Year 10's it is going to be important that ATA spends time in making sure that the students are exam ready. Year 12 (students who have missed a significant amount of Year 10 and 11) will have an additional lesson per subject.

CMs have started to plan for the additional teaching period in Year 12 - that will include content that was missed in Year 11, which ATA calls threshold concepts. These are concepts that students have to know before they can access something at a higher level, and ATA are making sure that students have baseline assessments to check that they have mastered those threshold concepts before encountering new content in year 12.

Now, the priority is to focus on the next few weeks of assessments and then ATA will have the summer term, when the focus for CMs will be to plan for September.

ATA want to make sure that the curriculum benefits everyone equally across the school and that therefore the best way that can be done is focusing on teaching, on the curriculum, and ensuring students get the best quality provision every single day and into next year as well.

DMI advised the Board that he recently spoke with a parent of a Year 7 Child at the end of the school day. They were very positive about the Academy's day and remarked about other children attending different schools in the area that finish at earlier times from ATA. When thinking about the summer school potential and then looking at ATA's students who have had a full day with homework, DMI feels that ATA students are in a very good position and their routines are well established.


If ATA were to target specific children who have not attended online lessons over lockdown to attend Academy lessons in the summer holidays when other students are not being asked to attend, DMI feels that the level of success would be limited. The real strength of the Academy is everybody being present, everybody being part of the same routine, everybody working hard and that the expectation and sense of ambition is the same for every student.

DW asked colleagues if they were in support of JCA's analysis and DMI's conclusions and they were unanimous in their support.

7. Any other business

There was no other business.

DW thanked colleagues for attending and their continued support.

Signed: 
Richard Whitcutt
Chair of Executive Board

Date: 14/07/2021