

Point Blank Ltd

Minutes of a Board Meeting

Held by digital video conference on Thursday 11th June 2020 at 1pm.

Present:-

Mr Robert Cowan - Director & CEO

Mr Jules Brookes – Director, Head of Provider, Chair

Mr Peter Black - Non-Executive Director

Dr Andrew Gower - Non-Executive director

Mr Keith Harris - Non-Executive Director

Matters Arising and adoption of Previous Meeting Minutes

There were no matters arising and the previous minutes were adopted unanimously.

Head of Providers Report

Jules as Head of Provider gave his report, verbally.

Overview of School performance in Covid-19 pandemic:

- The main themes of Point Blank's lockdown period have been resilience, innovation; agility; talent and teamwork.
- Prior to the government's prescribed lockdown, the School began to stress test the effects of having to shut down the physical campus and ran tests for lectures that could be delivered remotely to students who were not attending in person. These tests were designed to learn about the difficulties of delivery in terms of software, lighting, visibility and engagement issues. Items that were assessed included lecturer specific needs; student experience; communications; which modules could not be delivered virtually.
- Following consultation with our students via the Student Voice Leaders, and with Middlesex University, the School closed its physical doors on March 18th.
- Carefully prepared communications were sent out, alerting students to the various options they had in terms of their learning, clearly signposting both the virtual delivery we had prepared as well as the options for deferral etc.
- A number of international students returned home to quarantine with their families and others deferred their start dates.
- More than 80% of all students were retained in the Virtual Classroom.
- We saw a slight downturn in student recruitment for the London School in the early days of the quarantine, mainly due to a loss of foreign student enrolments. The loss in revenue was considered minimal since we have been able to retain students through a very successful online teaching initiative that we have named Virtual Classroom. It entails use of our Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) coupled with Zoom and other remote learning applications. We have been able to incorporate a suite of student engagement elements such as wellbeing counselling; 1-2-1 live tutorials (personal lessons), Studio Lab Time (supervised private practice), full lectures which successfully mirror the delivery schedule in the London School; a range of Student Services; and virtual lectures and events featuring guests from the entertainment industry.
- We have seen a dramatic uptake in recruitment to the Online School converse to the slight downturn experienced in the London School. April-May 2020 saw Online School recruitment increase by 316% in the same period in 2019.
- This would appear to be related to the lockdown period as people look to engage with something meaningful during quarantine.

- As a result of the move online, we have learned much from the remote delivery of Virtual Classroom and are in the process of applying this to the Online School delivery e.g. rolling out Zoom in tandem with our VLE to replace our older system of broadcast; increasing the weekly masterclass duration; incorporating dual time zones for scheduled lessons to accommodate our global audience; signposting and investigating failed enrolment alerts within a shorter space of time; utilising LA-based lecturers to cater for multiple time zones; upskilling the LA lecturers to be able to teach our online provision; creating remote studio support via Studio Lab Time and rolling this out to the online school students as well; offering wellbeing counselling to the online students as well as the London campus cohort.
- The innovation of our student provision has been accelerated by lockdown e.g. as requested by our validating Higher Education institution, we have successfully communicated learning outcome changes to Middlesex University to the few modules we could not deliver online in the April term so that we can also deliver these in the Virtual Classroom for the July term. These minor modifications were approved by the University.
- Student feedback has been extremely positive, even in the current atmosphere of uncertainty.

Other Regulatory Matters

- We have successfully completed our Annual Financial Return for 2019 to Office for Students (OfS)
- We have completed our application to switch registration category to Approved (Fee Cap).
- We are currently awaiting the OfS Fee Cap decision which is due to be announced by 31st July at the latest. If approved, Fee Cap will be applicable for students enrolling for the September 2020 term.
- The Department for Education (DfE), via Independent Higher Education (iHE) representatives, have confirmed in writing that Point Blank will not be subject to Student Number Controls.

Summary

- Focused activities on student engagement designed to increase retention rates through improving the student experience.
- The School is financially stable – we've exceeded our budgeted forecasts in turnover and profit.
- SLC is releasing funds early in the Autumn term as well as an extra measure of support due to Covid-19.

Expansion Project

Rob advised that the intended building premises expansion has seen a slowing down due to the Covid-19 epidemic. The space for expansion will be needed, with or without fee cap, but it is anticipated that the plans will change due to the recent experience of flexible learning methods and working arrangements for staff. It is expected that the project will go ahead early next year and the School is in a sound financial position to do so.

Review of Report from Academic Board

The Board had received the report from the Academic Board which met on 14th May 2020. The Board reviewed the minutes, noting a focus on student engagement and on teaching and learning, as well as the resources provided to students to support their learning. The Board fully endorsed the emphasis on sharing best practice and the interest in educational innovation. The Board also noted the student feedback on the current library provision and recommended to the Head of Provider to develop potential options to share with students for their consideration and feedback. It was anticipated that an enhancement of digital resources alongside any potential for increased study space could be attractive to students studying at the London campus. With widening participation in mind, the Board also endorsed the School's Admissions Committee focus on the whole student journey, and the ways in which, informed by insight from students, progression and attainment is being monitored in support of student success.

The Board noted that staff had adapted well to the enforced change in both working environment and methods. The Board expressed thanks to all members of staff for the hard work and professionalism shown in adapting to the new environment in a seamless manner.

Review of the Report from the Executive Committee

The Board had received the report from the Executive Committee which met on 20th May 2020. The Board reviewed the minutes and noted that the implementation of the company wide KPI monitoring had been delayed due to the School closure. The setting of KPIs is a requirement of the ongoing risk management review and the Board expect to receive the updated report in time for the next Board meeting.

Similarly, the Executive Committee had not been able to finalise departmental budgets and the Board agreed that such budgets, although not critical in view of the relative size and number of students in the School, should, nevertheless be re- instated as soon as is practicable.

The Board had received the draft of the proposed Ethics Policy and members had proposed several amendments. It was agreed that the Board of Directors should be the owner of this policy and responsible for its annual update. The revised Ethics Policy together with the Gifts Policy was approved by the Board. It was agreed that the ethics policy be uploaded to the School website. The Executive Committee proposed that the School subscribe to Monday.com being a project management system whereby all School systems and policies and procedures can be uploaded and stored with controlled access to facilitate remote working and better management of staff and their training and development. The Board approved this proposal.

Review of report of Audit and Value for Money Committee

The Audit committee met prior to the Board meeting. Peter, as chair of the audit committee, reported to the Board.

The Chair, on behalf of the committee advised that the committee had reviewed the management account pack for the quarter ended 31st March 2020 and that, following discussion, had been adopted by the meeting. He was pleased to report that the School had exceeded budgeted fee income by 6% and the surplus before other income and dividends paid by 22.4%. He advised that since this was the first quarter of the year and was therefore relatively unaffected by the Covid-19 emergency which closed the School from 18th March, these results were not necessarily indicative of the forthcoming Q2 2020.

The Board, having also had sight of the management accounts pack prior to the meeting, approved the adoption of the accounts as presented.

The Audit Committee had also received an update to the Risk Register. Various amendments were discussed and agreed by the Audit Committee.

It was further agreed that these recommendations be adopted and that a revised version be presented prior to the next meeting. Risk management is an ongoing process which will be refined based on experience. The committee are satisfied that the School has adopted formal policies for risk management and that staff at all levels are being trained to take responsibility for meeting acceptable standards.

The Board accepted the proposals of the Audit Committee and the Head of Provider will ensure that the proposals are implemented.

Any Other Business

In the interests of transparency, the Board agreed to highlight Peter Black's longstanding relationship to the School in his role as Senior Partner at Jack Ross, Chartered Accountants, as its accountant and financial advisor and that this should be noted in the minutes.

It was agreed that the School had performed well in the Covid-19 emergency and was learning from it. The Board agreed that students should be consulted on the future model for the School expansion and that expert advice be sought in the planning of future student surveys. The Board expressed unanimous support for the "Black Lives Matter" campaign and re-iterated that racism within the organisation will not be tolerated in any form.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 3pm.



Jules Brookes, Head of Provider & Chair of the Meeting