

Department for Education Board Meeting
22 October 2020, 13:00 - 17:00
Permanent Secretary's Board Room, DfE London

Attendees

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson
MP

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP

Richard Pennycook

Ian Ferguson

Irene Lucas

Ruby McGregor-Smith

Toby Peyton Jones

Susan Acland-Hood

Indra Morris

Mike Green

Jonathan Clear

Title

Secretary of State (Chair)

Minister of State for School Standards

Lead Non-Executive Board Member

Non-Executive Board Member

Non-Executive Board Member

Non-Executive Board Member

Non-Executive Board Member

Acting Permanent Secretary

Director General, Social Care, Mobility and
Disadvantage

Chief Operating Officer

Strategic Finance Director

Other Attendees

Hollie Godsmark

Shelley Cooper

Title

Principal Private Secretary to the Secretary of State
Board Secretary

Apologies

Nick Timothy

Rt Hon Michelle Donelan

MP

Rt Hon Vicky Ford MP

Title

Non-Executive Board Member

Minister of State for Universities

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children
and Families

1. INTRODUCTION, MINUTES AND ACTION TRACKER

1.1 Minister Gibb welcomed members to the meeting and noted apologies from Nick Timothy, Minister Donelan and Minister Ford.

1.2 The minutes and action tracker from the previous meeting were accepted without amendment.

1.3 Baroness McGregor-Smith declared that she was the President of the Chambers of Commerce. No further or changed interests relevant to the agenda were declared.

2. Sub-Committee Update

- 2.1 Minister Gibb introduced the item.
- 2.2 The Board received an update on the Audit and Risk Committee (ARC) noting that the Group accounts would be laid before Parliament in the first week of November and that all accounts within the DfE family were unqualified.
- 2.3 The Board noted that the Nominations Committee had met three times since the previous Board meeting and there had been an increase in the number of strong applications for public appointments.
- 2.4 The Implementation Committee had focussed on the 2020 Spending Review and the roll out of T-Levels and the National Tutoring Programme.
- 2.5 The Board were informed of the work of the Leadership Team, and their discussion at weekly COVID Board meetings. Key areas of focus had included preparation for the Spending Review, workforce planning, and the importance of learning and development.
- 2.6 The Secretary of State (SoS), expressed his thanks to Jonathan Slater on behalf of the DfE Board. During his 5-year tenure as Permanent Secretary, Jonathan had driven up standards in education and shown great commitment to improving outcomes for all young people.
- 2.7 SoS welcomed Susan Acland-Hood as Acting Permanent Secretary to her first Board meeting.
- 2.8 It was noted that Lucy Smith, the Director General for Covid Response and Schools Recovery, would be leaving the DfE in mid-December.

3. Spending Review Update

- 3.1 The Board noted that the Treasury (HMT) had announced a one-year spending review settlement and discussed the risks and opportunities of this to the Department.
- 3.2 In discussion, the Board agreed the importance of longer-term funding for both capital projects and delivery of Further Education and Higher Education reforms.
- 3.3 The Board were content with the proposed approach to the revised scope of the Spending Review settlement.

4. Quarterly Performance Report

- 4.1 The Board considered the Quarterly Performance Report and noted that, as of the 9 October, 99.7% of state funded schools were open and 89.7% were fully open. School attendance levels remained good.
- 4.2 The DfE had launched T-Levels, opening of 35 free schools, and provided over 250,000 laptops to support the remote learning of disadvantaged

children.

- 4.3 Future priorities for the Department included managing university students travelling home for Christmas and their subsequent return for the Spring term, the smooth running of exams, and admission procedures during 2021.

5. Reflections on the DfE's COVID Response

- 5.1 The Board considered the Reflections on the DfE's COVID Response work. Members noted that a key achievement had been ensuring that transport was available to take students back to school and college. This had been a prerequisite to the successful re-opening of education settings in September.
- 5.2 The Board discussed the importance of issuing clear and timely guidance for education settings.
- 5.3 The Board agreed that the DfE must consider its structure, including reflecting on what would be best managed centrally and what could be effectively achieved via regional vertices.
- 5.4 The Board also recognised the importance of staff wellbeing and resilience along with the importance of empowering the best people to perform well in key roles across the DfE.

6. Further Education

- 6.1 The Board considered an overview of Further Education (FE) reform and noted that the ambition was to introduce a coherent national system of employer-led education standards with a focus on qualifications that boost economic productivity.
- 6.2 In discussion, the Board noted the benefits of building on existing relationships and taking a sectorial approach to communication at a regional level to ensure future FE and skills offer would be responsive to the needs of the local and regional economy.
- 6.3 The Board agreed that it would be essential to consider the impact of the FE reforms on the Higher Education sector.

7. Civil Service Modernisation and Reform Programme

- 7.1 The Board noted an update on the Civil Service Modernisation and Reform Programme and took assurance that the Future DfE work was well aligned with this programme.
- 7.2 The Board discussed that the composition of DfE staff should be representative of the communities that the Department serves and agreed that the Department should be an exemplar employer of apprentices. At their next meeting, the Board would discuss proposals to support the

career paths of colleagues that have completed apprenticeship, and ways to increase the number of apprentices that progress to the Senior Civil Service (SCS).

7.3 Members recognised the importance of investing in the development of staff and empowering colleagues to realise their full potential.

8. AOB

8.1 Jonathan Clear introduced [DfEB (20-10) 8 Star Chambers] and explained that the November Star Chamber meetings would be tactical sessions to identify savings and to drive value from DfE expenditure.

8.2 The Board agreed that the Star Chambers would report into the Implementation Committee.

8.3 SoS acknowledged that this was Jonathan Clear's final Board meeting and congratulated him on his new role. SoS thanked him for contribution both as Board member and as Strategic Finance Director.