Minutes – Digitech Studio School Academy Council

Meeting Date: Thursday 7 December 2023
Location: TEAMS
Time: 6.00pm

AC Members		Attended	Apologies
Rob Gillman (RG)	Sponsor 1 **(Chair)**	✔	
Russ Gallon (RGA)	Sponsor 2	✔	
Antony Merritt (AM)	Sponsor 3		✔
Rebecca Kemp (RK)	Sponsor 4		✔
Lewis Wild (LW)	Sponsor 5	✔	
Leila Henry-Thorne (LHT)	Teaching staff Councillor		✔
V Balasco (VB)	Support Staff Councillor		✔
Vacancy	Student Advocate		
Vacancy	LA Representative		
Chris Ballard (CB)	Principal	✔	
Vacancy	Parent Councillor		
Vacancy	Parent Councillor		
Kath Cooper (KC)	Senior Principal	✔	
Invited attendees			
Wendy Hellin (WH)	Clerk	✔	
Simon Jones (SJ)	Vice Principal	✔	
Gareth Williams (GW)	Associate Assistant Principal	✔ part	

Matters Arising:

Date/No	Action	Owner
10.10.23 01	SC will circulate a digital copy of the Teaching and Learning Framework to Academy Councillors. This item is complete and can be **closed.**	SC

Minutes

Item	Description	Action
1	**Introductions, Administration, Apologies**	
1.1	RG opened the meeting and welcomed those present.	
2	**Declaration of Interest**	
2.1	No verbal declarations were made.	
3	**Academy Council Membership**	
3.1	Governor vacancies were discussed. RGa advised that he is aware of a person interested in becoming a Parent Councillor. RGa will pass the details to RGi and CB and RGi will take this forward. RGi will also follow up another potential councillor that had to withdraw from applying before the summer for personal reasons.	
4	**Minutes of Previous Meeting**	
4.1	The minutes of the meeting of 10 October 23 were confirmed as a true record.	
5	**Matters Arising**	
5.1	The action table above has been updated.	
6	**Luke Fazackerley – Boomsatsuma**	

6.1	RGi introduced Luke Fazackerley who has been invited to share highlights of how the relationship between DSSB and Boomsatsuma is going, including information about courses, curriculum and the student cohort. RGi advised that the Academy Council are also interested in hearing how Boomsatsuma is benefitted by the working partnership and if there is anything more that is needed from DSSB to make the partnership even more successful.	
6.2	Luke Fazackerley (LF) provided the following information: - There are 5 FE courses: Sports media, Films and Television, Creative and Digital Media, Photography Collective, and Games and Effects. - Photography Collective is the newest of courses in its second year of intake and it is run very differently to a usual A level course. A level is more a solo venture; the Photography Collective is a collaboration between 20 photographers and they exhibit to the public 3 times a year. At each exhibition last year, there was over 150 people in attendance. This means that by the time students apply to university they have already experienced 6 exhibitions. - Film and Television is taught at the Bottle Yard Studios, where students get first-hand experience in a working studio. Currently the model studied is around natural history and students make a documentary about a live animal; this year it is the preying mantis. - The Creative and Digital Media course covers a broad range of subjects. Currently students are working with YUUP Bristol and are given a different experience in Bristol and are making videos to promote it to customers. - Retention on all courses is very good. There has been just one student leave a course and they have been coached and are now following a different pathway. - Attendance is at 92%. Staff are happy and are enjoying teaching the courses. - LF and CB meet every fortnight to discuss progress and anything either needs support with. A current topic is Education Access Arrangements.	
6.3	**Questions to LF from the Academy Council**	
6.3.1	**There is a new Safeguarding Lead at Digitech. How are they working with you and with Boomsatsuma?**	
6.3.2	This was part of our conversation last week. There was a very close relationship between the previous Safeguarding Lead and Boomsatsuma and we want to ensure this continues with the new Lead.	
6.3.3	**There are a lot of students that will be doing resits in English and maths. How do you manage that at Boomsatsuma?**	
6.3.4	It is a challenge. We try our best to get them to understand the value of maths. We regularly have a higher intake of students that require resits than other Post 16 provisions due to the creative nature of our courses; often students that are creative might not also be mathematicians. In addition, last year the grade boundaries increased, and some students that would previously have achieved a C grade, did not do so this year. In terms of approach, we do not pool our resit students and teach them in one place. The English and maths lessons are timed to start and finish around the times of other timetabled lessons so that students are less inclined to skip a lesson. Class sizes vary from 2 or 3 students, up to 7 or 8 students. Students tend to engage more in their resit lessons when class sizes are small. We offer functional skills as well as GCSE resits.	
6.3.5	**Do you know what your conversion was in the summer for students that achieved a grade 4 in English and maths following resit?**	
6.3.6	No but I can provide that data after the meeting.	
6.3.7	RGi thanked LF and he left the meeting.	
6.3.8	**Questions to the Principal from the Academy Council**	
6.3.9	**You mentioned you were reviewing the subcontracting arrangements. Can you provide an update on that?**	

6.3.10	We are working with the COO around the renewal of contracts with all partnerships to ensure they are aligned to ESFA regulations. In most cases partnerships like this happen in colleges rather than schools so it has taken a bit of work to understand how it works in schools. The contracts have now been written and are on a four-year cycle with 3 meetings each year to ensure the Service Level Agreement is being met on both sides. The contracts detail which party is responsible for a variety of things such as health and safety, insurance and safeguarding. With this in place, I will be freed up to focus on the quality assurance side of things.	
6.3.11	**Is Digitech encouraging more students to Boomsatsuma courses than in the past?**	
6.3.12	Not noticeably. We encourage all students to the right path for them and this includes to other Post 16 providers. In regards to pathways, this year students are leaning towards digital media or photography as they recognise these as provisions with good outcomes and immersive experiences.	
7	**Academy Council Report**	
7.1	**Achievement and Standards – Year 11 mocks – Gareth Williams**	
7.1.1	GW provided the following information: - A huge piece of work has been completed around mock exams this term. - Based on the mock results, Year 11 has been reorganised into new sets this term, organised so that higher attaining students are in the same group. There is now a higher and foundation set in maths and science. - The mock results were relatively positive and are higher than at this stage last year. In some areas, the results are already higher than final summer results last year. - Data has now been collected; although it was not ready for the AC report. - Maths is now up to 40% (grade 4 or above) English is at 45%; both are higher than at this point last year. - The progress between this time last year, and the end year was 0.7% per student per grade. - Predictions are around 44% for basics, which is still not quite as high as we wish. - It is hoped there will be more progress due to the reorganisation of sets. - One higher tier group with about 27 students has already reached grade 4. - The other groups are smaller and extra support is being put in place to get students up to grade 4. - So far this has been successful, there has been a week's worth of lessons and every group has been positive, with some phenomenal work taking place. The cohort will see a good increase in progress, even for the students who do not manage to secure a grade 4. - The next focus will be around the introduction of the extra period 7 lesson twice a week; this will take the form of a small group focused on core areas and any identified gaps. - It will be for targeted students, not all students, and will commence in January. - There is positive performance in some of the option subjects, including IT, media graphics and games. There are improvements required in art and business. - There is also ongoing work with around 6 to 8 students who were exam refusers or who demonstrated poor exam practice, dysregulation or anxiety.	
7.2	**Questions from the Academy Council**	
7.2.1	**This time last year, the mock data was also positive, yet the final outcomes were less strong. Are you confident in the predictions this year?**	
	We used the grade boundaries from 2019 last year. This year we used those from 2022 and results were 15 marks on average higher than last year, and that is against increased grade boundaries. We are confident, therefore, with these predictions.	
7.2.2	**In terms of grade boundaries, are you expecting them to go up again, for the summer exams?**	

7.2.3	They will not go down. There may be an increase but it is unlikely to be as significant a jump as last year.	
7.2.4	**The top set is a rather large class. A class of that size cannot cope with much behavioural disruption. How do you deal with that?**	
7.2.5	Class sizes at Digitech are already smaller than other academies across the federation. To us, 27 feels big, but it is not more than a regular class size. There feels like there is a nice working environment in that class. Students were apprehensive at first but have settled well, with most issues ironed out now. Maths feels productive, and both English and Science seem to be going well. The smaller lower set class are benefiting from receiving more attention and this is also working well.	
7.2.6	**Do you know how many students in Year 11 will require exam access arrangements?**	
7.2.7	It is approximately 35 out of 90 students. We use a computer room for 15 students and have a further 6 separate rooms and another classroom for those students that have extra time.	
7.3	**Trust Wide Updates – Kath Cooper**	
7.3.1	KC provided the following updates: • The CLF growth plan and strategy continues. Monkton Wood Academy joined the trust at the end of November. There are some further primary schools in Taunton and South Bristol joining before the end of the academic year. • The strategy is to continue to grow well and remain strong as a mature trust, and to support the mechanisms in place to serve all provisions, existing and new. • Capacity is being added to the central team to ensure the right resources are in place to cope with the growth. • The Executive Team are putting together a free school bid to be considered for a SEMH special school in the Mendips area. • There is a lot of activity in North Somerset in terms of Ofsted; reports will be shared trust wide once officially published by Ofsted.	
7.4	**ARM, ARV and other DSSB updates**	
7.4.1	KC advised that CB has put forward a paper to the Executive Team detailing the additional capacity needed in Digitech that the current budget will not support. The Executive Team have recognised that need and have approved recruitment to bring additional capacity to the leadership team, specifically around behaviour and culture and for pastoral support in the form of therapeutic resolve for high need students.	
7.4.2	KC provided an update on the recent ARV which had been very positive. Staff received the ARV team well. The team were able to spend a short amount of time in 14 different lessons and the feedback was positive although there was some variation in practice observed. This was around things like students going in and out of lessons and some further behavioural things. Culture and ethos was strong and this came though student voice. There is an innovative approach to tackling the issues around mobile phones.	
7.4.3	**Can you tell us more about the approach to mobile phones?**	
7.4.4	It is clear to us that mobile phones can be a significant distraction for students. We have tightened the expectations around the consequences of being on the phone; students are likely to lose the offending items temporarily (phones and headphones). We have not gone as far as banning them from use in social time; we want to educate students on the appropriate use of devices so they can use them sensibly. We will continue to review this.	
7.4.5	**There will be a vacancy in the English department from January. Are the CLF able to support the potential vacancy there if recruitment is unsuccessful?**	
7.4.6	Yes, the trust will support in recruiting to that vacancy. There is a recruitment challenge at present across teaching and leadership. CB and SJ have done extensive work in exploring internal avenues and some conversations are still live. If a fixed term solution is found, all avenues will be explored to ensure that an expert is in front of the young people in January.	

	Despite the challenge in English, Digitech is a popular place to work. Other areas of recruitment have been very successful, with some roles having an overwhelming response.	
7.4.7	KC left the meeting.	
7.5	**Destinations update and careers**	
7.5.1	RGi confirmed that careers will be covered in two meetings. SJ will provide some information about the Gatsby Benchmarks and Destinations, and at a later meeting, the Careers Lead will be invited to come and discuss the careers strategy and plans with the AC.	
7.5.2	**Gatsby Benchmarks – Simon Jones**	
7.5.3	SJ gave a presentation on the Gatsby Benchmarks. The slides are shared in the Teams meeting folder for reference.	
7.5.4	**Destinations – Simon Jones**	
7.5.5	Destinations measures are the data that the DfE publishes in performance tables as an accountability tool. They record the number of students who have been in a sustained destination for six months in the year after finishing key stage 4 or key stage 5 study. SJ noted that the school has to track the destinations of students for up to 3 years after they leave school. The measures are taken in September (the September Guarantee), March (March Guarantee), and at 3 years. The information is collected from students who let the school know their intent before leaving, and then is confirmed via phone calls to parents and carers in September and March. The measure is for all students that go on to further education, employment or training. Any students that do not take one of those routes is recorded as Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET). The main part that is a challenge for Digitech is the 3-year measure.	
7.5.6	**Questions from the Academy Council**	
7.5.7	**It is good to see progress made in embedding the careers curriculum into wider curriculum areas. The 3-year destinations seem challenging – is this a new measure?**	
7.5.8	No, it has always been the case. We can hear more on that when we invite the Careers Lead to speak to the AC.	
7.5.9	**Does the Careers Lead work in isolation or is she part of trust wide networks?**	
7.5.10	The trust provides a huge amount of support for our Careers Lead. The Careers Lead for the trust, Craig Jordan co-ordinates this via a network where colleagues meet and share ideas. Careers work is very much more integrated into the curriculum and wider school now.	
7.5.11	**Do you have a figure for how many students are NEET? Is there a national average?**	
7.5.12	The national average is the reverse measure – so the number of students with appropriate destinations and that is around 92/93%. Digitech is at 96% with just 3 students that are NEET.	
7.5.13	**ACTION: Digitech's Career Lead to be invited to the next AC meeting.**	**RGi CB**
7.6	**Attendance**	
7.6.1	RGi noted that the AC had a full discussion on attendance at the last meeting and asked for a brief update.	
7.6.2	SJ advised that attendance remains a challenge and is currently around 92%. The Attendance Officer continues to do a superb job; the challenge is the context and complexity of the situations of some of the students. Each has their own story and the team has a good grasp of those for each pupil. Colleagues met with many families last term and those meetings will continue. Attendance is slightly up on this time last year.	
7.7	**Behaviour and Exclusions**	
7.7.1	CB reported that the site feels calm. There have been some bold decisions taken recently around individual students which have led to permanent exclusion. There were a very small number of students that were impacting the feel of the whole site and since those students have left there is a noticeable improvement. Short-term suspensions have reduced, which is positive, but they are a necessary sanction in order for staff to ensure the learning environment is effective for all.	

	CB confirmed there is a need for more capacity at Digitech to enable further pastoral work to take place with the cohort, who have greater needs than in many other mainstream schools.	
7.7.2	**What work has taken place so far, to further support students?**	
7.7.3	We have tripled the pastoral team and this will allow further therapeutic work. We have upskilled staff in de-escalation skills. Having a team of 3 on the ground working with these students will have a positive impact on behaviour and culture, and therefore on learning.	
8	**Progress against AIP**	
8.1	**Questions from the Academy Council**	
8.2	**Historically there has for some time been a big focus on disadvantaged students. That remains, but there is now also a big focus on SEND. There is a big piece from the central team about Professional Services development and all staff have a target to work to. Are you ensuring that target is met? What activity has taken place so far, especially for initiatives such as Raising Attainment, QA and coaching?**	
8.2.1	We have done a lot of work with staff to drive practice around RA and around meeting needs. There is a shift in regard to our focus and the trust focus. We have definitely not moved away from disadvantaged, but there also has to be a focus on SEND. The percentage of students with EHCPs has risen to 11.4% so there is work ongoing around pedagogy and we are using a new QA framework that continues to evolve. Further work is to be done in developing hub provision and rolling out intervention strategies; a plan is in place now that extra resource has been approved. The focus priority is that of the quality of teaching in every classroom; it is fundamental to progress and will form part of the upcoming ARM and ARVs. Overall, most actions in the AIP are on track.	
9	**Safeguarding**	
9.1	RGi noted that RK is the safeguarding AC and will provide an update at the next meeting. RGi noted it would also be good to welcome Phil De Scossa (DSL) to the next meeting. **ACTION: CB to invited PDS (DSL) to the next meeting to discuss safeguarding with the AC.**	**CB**
10	**Finance, Health and Safety and Estates**	
10.1	Nothing further to report.	
11	**Staffing and Wellbeing to include staff voice**	
11.1	Staff Survey	
11.1.1	CB reported that the staff survey had a 49% completion rate. It will be repeated termly and it is hoped a higher number of staff will engage with it next time. The results show the majority of staff feel happy, comfortable and like they belong at Digitech. RGa noted that a desirable return rate would be 60% or greater and asked if CB had investigated why some staff did not complete it. CB noted that some staff said they were happy and did not feel they needed to complete it. CB advised that the importance of the survey will be communicated ahead of next term's survey going out.	
12	**Student Voice**	
12.1	Nothing further was reported.	
13	**Policies**	
13.1	No policies were presented for review at this meeting.	
14	**Outlook for next year**	
14.1	This has been covered in the AC report.	
15	**Governance**	
15.1	Nothing further was reported.	
16	**EDI**	
16.1	Nothing further was reported.	
17	**Matters for the attention of the Board**	
17.1	None	
18	**AOB**	

18.1	It was agreed that there would be a subject focus at each meeting going forwards. It was suggested that the first subject might be English. **ACTION: RGi and CB will create a schedule.**	**RGi CB**
18.2	**The meeting closed at 19.50 hours.**	

Date/No	Action	Owner
07.12.23 001	Digitech's Careers Lead to be invited to the next AC meeting.	RGi CB
07.12.23 002	CB to invited PDS (DSL) to the next meeting to discuss safeguarding with the AC.	RGi CB
07.12.23 003	RGi and CB will create a schedule of Subject Leaders to invite to AC meetings.	CB