

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees
Held on Thursday, 2 April 2020 at 3.00pm
Zoom Conference Call**

Name	Position	Attendance
Trustees		
Ben Bartlett (BB)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Kate Chhatwal OBE (KC)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Mark Ducker OBE (MD)	Executive Trustee - CEO	Present
Angela Farrell (AF)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Ross Gardner (RG)	Non-Executive Trustee (Vice Chair of Trustees)	Apologies (accepted)
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (for items 1 -14)
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present
Attendees		
Paul Glover PG)	Deputy CEO	Present
John Halliwell (JH)	Director of Leadership Development	Present
Philippa Jackson (PJ)	Governance Clerk	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present

1	<p><u>Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping</u></p> <p>RV welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly PL and SS, who would be appointed as Trustees at the meeting. Apologies had been received from RG (work commitments). RV asked the new Trustees to introduce themselves and provide some background to their skills and experience.</p> <p>SS had a background in public relations and corporate communications with multi nationals and new technology startups. She was very interested in the UK education system and committed to helping young people increase their ambition and aspirations, particularly those from less privileged communities. She strongly believed in STEP’s aspirations and the importance of education for all genders and looked forward to joining the Board as a Trustee.</p> <p>PL currently worked at HM Treasury as a Senior Advisor on local government funding. He previously worked with the Department for Education on the academisation and school improvement programmes. He was very supportive of STEP and keen to take on a voluntary role as a Trustee. He lived very close to Angel Oak Academy and had been very supportive of the work that STEP had done within the school. PL was also a vice-chair of governors for a local authority maintained primary school in Southwark.</p>
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2	<p><u>Quorum</u></p> <p>The Clerk declared the meeting quorate.</p>
3	<p><u>Appointment of Trustees</u></p> <p>Trustees approved the appointment of SS and PL as STEP Trustees for a four-year term. The Clerk confirmed that satisfactory references and DBS had been received.</p>
4	<p><u>Review of Pecuniary and Conflicts Interests</u></p> <p>There were no pecuniary or other potential conflicts of interest declared.</p> <p>Trustees confirmed they had updated their personal and pecuniary interests on the Trust Governor system.</p>
5	<p><u>Covid 19 Status Update</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the Covid 19 briefing paper and the Safeguarding Policy addendum which had been circulated earlier that week.</p> <p>The Executive Team provided an update on the Trust’s response to Covid 19. MD advised that during this time, the Trust had ensured that the Government’s guidance had been followed by the schools and was in line with the STEP Compass.</p> <p>JH provided an update on how some of the schools had supported the children and families over the last couple of weeks. STEP First had been demonstrated by all teams. All the schools had prioritised the children and staff during this difficult time. Turnham Academy had supported two Local Authority schools in Lewisham which had clearly demonstrated the Trust’s mission, vision and values and offered support to the children and local community where they could. The biggest challenge for the schools was safeguarding the vulnerable children and families while they were at home. Robust safeguarding procedures and the Government’s guidelines continued to be followed, including regular calls to the vulnerable families, carried out by the safeguarding leads. Staff well-being had also been well supported within the schools which had tested the different networks already in place across the Trust.</p> <p>MD was delighted to see the overwhelming response of the staff and schools during this challenging time. There had been lots of examples of the strong sense of unity across the Trust, which had always been prioritised in STEP. He thanked BM for providing oversight of the business strategy.</p> <p>MD had been delighted to write the first edition of the weekly STEP First blog to ensure that the staff and schools stayed connected and to reflect how we worked together as a Trust. The Trust was in a strong position to support the children with their home learning and to provide additional support to the disadvantaged children during this time.</p> <p>Trustees raised the following questions:</p> <p>Q: In relation to the disadvantaged children, the educational gap would be expected to widen during this time. Was there anything that the Trust could do at this stage to minimise the gap?</p>

How could the Trust ensure that all families had access to on-line learning? How could the Trust prepare for the rapid catch up when the children returned to school? It was the duty of the Board of Trustees to ensure that staff were safeguarded and that regular breaks were taken during this difficult time. How could you ensure that the take-away food for the free school meal children had been maximised?

A: In relation to the free school meals, BM advised that the Government's guidelines stated that the meals should be available to children where possible. The catering services within the STEP schools was carried out in house. The schools had identified the children at risk and had contacted the families to ensure that the meals were available. The meals had been delivered on an exceptional basis to families that were unable to collect the food from school. A voucher scheme would be introduced from the Summer term 1 and would be extended to universal free school meals.

A: In relation to the disadvantaged children, JH advised that home learning progress checks had been carried out with the vulnerable children and families. A section on the school websites had been created where families could access materials for home learning through work books. A range of websites and videos were also available. Further home learning packs would be posted out to families over the Easter holiday. One of the biggest concerns was the early years reading skills. The Trust would look at ways to deliver phonics support. Any gaps in the learning of the disadvantaged children would be quickly identified when the children returned. The curriculum would be adapted to ensure that any work that had been missed in previous terms was incorporated into the current curriculum.

A: In relation to staff well-being, staff breaks and health and safety, PG advised that a number of measures had been put in place to support this. Within each school, a rota had been produced to ensure that the Heads and SLT had some time off. The Executive Team maintained regular contact through video calls. MD reassured Trustees that he would ensure that the Executive Team members took some time off over the Easter holiday.

Trustees recognised that this was an unprecedented situation and the Government's guidelines created a challenge for the Trustees, Executive Team and staff. They were reassured that the Trust had gone above and beyond the guidelines. They were also reassured to hear that the vulnerable children and families had been a priority. Trustees thanked the Executive Team and the staff within the schools for all their efforts during this difficult time. It clearly demonstrated STEP's mission, vision and values. The past few weeks had demonstrated that the Trust placed the children's interests at the heart of everything.

Q: What was the Trust's approach to staff wellbeing? Had a risk assessment been carried out for the vulnerable members of staff that were most at risk?

A: A generic risk assessment had not been carried out. However, a risk assessment for vulnerable groups had been carried out on a school by school basis and incorporated into each academy's risk assessment. The Executive Heads had been in touch with the Heads to ensure that this had been completed for vulnerable employees. In some of the schools, discussions had also been held with vulnerable employees that lived alone, to offer support where possible.

Trustees thanked the Executive Team and the STEP staff for all they had done to support the children and families. STEP had an obligation to help all the families within the community and were morally bound to do so where they could. The Trust had clearly demonstrated this. They were delighted to hear that the Trust had gone above and beyond the Government's guidelines and thanked them for this.

6 **Minutes**

The minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on 16 December 2019 were approved. The Chair confirmed he would send a scanned copy of the signed minutes to the Clerk at the end of the meeting.

Trustees noted the STEP Risk Matrix and Risk Dashboard which had been updated with the risks raised at the Board meeting on 16 December 2019.

7 **Matters Arising from the Previous Meetings**

Trustees noted the actions from the previous meetings as set out in the agenda.

STEP First – We are all one team

8 **Chief Executive’s Report**

The CEO updated Trustees on developments within the Trust since the last meeting. It was noted that the report had been written prior to Covid 19 and the school closures.

History of STEP Academies

Trustees noted the overview of the STEP Academies. Trustees had found this useful information on the history and progress of the STEP schools.

STEP Standard

Trustees considered the STEP Standards Heat Map, which showed the Academies’ performance against the Trust’s performance standards. The data showed that the performance of the Academies within the Trust was strong and had moved closer to the STEP Standard. MD advised that the Heat Map now showed whether the STEP Standard score had gone up or down since the previous evaluation cycle. It also clearly reported how persistent absence (at Phoenix Academy) had impacted the attendance score.

Q: In relation to Governance and the Academy Committees, why had the scores for three of the Academies gone down?
 A: This related to the period of change and adjustment to the new Scheme of Delegation introduced this year. The score was expected to go back up over the Summer term once the Academy Committees had adjusted to the new governance structure.

STEP First

MD provided an update on external communications. Three nominations that had been made for the 2020 Pearson Teaching Awards had not been shortlisted. Whilst disappointing not to have been amongst the finalists, STEP would continue to identify representatives for national and regional awards. We were delighted, for example, that Elizabeth Crowther, a NQT at Breakwater had been awarded a Sussex Teacher of the Year Award.

The Chair of Trustees had visited all fourteen STEP Academies and provided feedback to the Executive Team. A number of observations, noted in the CEO’s report, would likely feature in the 2020-21 STEP Compass Priorities.

STEP Way

The Governance Action Plan, produced at the Board Development Day, had been updated and included with the Board papers. The Trustee Safeguarding Responsibilities and Guidance documents had also been revised and helped clarify the statutory and operational duties of the Executive Team, academy leaders and the Academy Committees.

STEP Up

A considerable amount of financial, operational and governance support had been provided to Trinity Academy Trust under a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU). The work had provided the Trust with an expected income of £30k through STEP Up Services. Trinity Academy had since decided not to join STEP. The additional capacity provided had been very well received by the school and the DfE and also had provided valuable experience to the STEP team.

Trustees were reassured to hear that although the Trust had wanted to move into the secondary stage, the opportunity with Trinity Academy had not been the right fit. They agreed that it had been the right decision not to proceed with the opportunity at this particular time. The Chair thanked BB for visiting the school and his input into the discussions.

STEP Ahead

PG provided an update on the Chapel Street Community Schools Trust (CSCST). STEP had been supporting Benedict Primary School under a MoU since November 2019, following a request from the RSC. Benedict, currently in Special Measures, was deemed to be making reasonable progress following a recent Ofsted monitoring visit, reflecting the strong support from STEP. AE would become Executive Head of Benedict from 1 April 2020.

Support was beginning for the two other schools that were currently part of CSCST. They were Park Community School in Morden and Westbridge Primary School in Battersea. These schools were expected to join STEP next month.

Q: Was the target for Park and Westbridge to join Trust by 1 May 2020?

A: Yes. Benedict was supposed to join the Trust in February 2020 but this had not happened due to the discussions on the financial support requested from the ESFA. Everything was on track for Benedict, Park and Westbridge to join by 1 May 2020.

Q: Had there been a collective view on proceeding with the secondary stage?

A: This question would be deferred to later in the meeting when Trustees discussed the secondary education business case.

Q: Given the growth of the Trust, had any thought been given to additional leadership capacity? Would any other potential capacity be considered once all three schools joined the Trust?

A: Some changes would be made to the Executive leadership capacity and this would continue to be reviewed as the schools improved. JH and TM would take on leadership roles and develop the fixed Executive Head roles for AE and JM. An external process was also underway to recruit an additional Executive Head from 1 September 2020 to support Turnham and a second Academy. The Chapel Street schools were all '1 form entry' schools and strong staffing capacity across this area was already in place.

	<p>Q: Could Trustees see a revised leadership structure as a result of the new schools joining? A: Yes. The education strategy for these three schools would be updated and would include an overview of leadership support and structure. This would be circulated to Trustees shortly.</p> <p>Action: Overview of leadership support and structure to be circulated to Trustees. (DCEO)</p> <p>Q: How confident were you of receiving the £300k capital work funding? A: The ESFA had confirmed that Benedict would transfer with a ‘zero balance’ and that all liabilities prior to transfer would remain with CSCST. A project meeting had been held with the ESFA and the financial package had been agreed, which totaled £1.3 million. The capital works financial support was expected to be in excess of £300,000. Conversations with the ESFA continued.</p> <p>Trustees thanked the Executive Team for the work they had done in negotiating the financial package for the new schools.</p> <p><u>STEP Compass Priorities 2020/21</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the draft STEP Compass Priorities for 2020/21.</p> <p>Trustees felt that there would be an opportunity to look at the education priorities in light of the Covid 19 crisis and how these could be delivered in new and innovative ways. It provided a good opportunity to think about the future of education and how the opportunities for the more disadvantaged children could be maximised.</p> <p>MD thanked Trustees for their feedback and agreed to reconsider the STEP Compass Priorities for 2020/21, in the light of the current situation.</p> <p>Action: Review the draft 2020-21 STEP Compass Priorities in the light of the current crisis. (CEO)</p> <p><i>Item on the Trust’s growth opportunities recorded in confidential minutes.</i></p> <p>Trustees thanked the CEO for his report.</p>
9	<p><u>Brexit Report</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the Brexit Report.</p>
10	<p><u>Well-Being Report</u></p> <p>JH provided a brief overview of the progress made within the Trust to raise awareness of the importance of well-being and mental health. Support and academic research about mental health and well-being had been provided by a STEP Head teacher. A STEP First Lead had been appointed to increase the provision and support for mental health across the schools, through on-line resources.</p> <p>Q: What was the trigger for well-being not working other than reviewing the results from a survey?</p>

	<p>A: Leaders were expected to use their soft skills to engage with staff and pupils on this and to look at ways to use this information appropriately. If something was not right with a member of staff or a pupil's work it could indicate that additional support was required.</p> <p>Trustees thanked JH for his report.</p>
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STEP Ahead – We invest in our future

<p>11</p>	<p><u>Secondary Business Case</u></p> <p><i>Discussions on the business case for secondary education were recorded in the confidential minutes.</i></p>
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<p>12</p>	<p><u>How STEP Standard Manages Risk</u></p> <p>BM provided a brief update on how risks were currently identified and managed within the Trust and the role played by the STEP Standard evaluation. The process of identifying risks and how these were being mitigated was recorded. This ensured a robust risk management process. The likelihood of risks occurring, the impact of the risks, the actions to mitigate the risk and a timeline were all formally reported to the Education and Finance and Operations Committees. The Trust's response to Covid 19 and the recent school closures demonstrated that the current risk management process was effective in managing operational risks.</p> <p>BM explained that the Trust held a Risk Register which included all the risks within the academies and those required by the ESFA. This was reviewed as part of the annual external audit.</p> <p>The Finance and Operations Committee also reviewed the Risk Dashboard which showed the current exposure to high level risks and how these were managed to ensure sustainability.</p> <p>The STEP Standards were regularly reviewed by the Committees and the scores focused on excellence within the different areas. The STEP Standards document provided a useful overview for Trustees and also highlighted the changes to the scores since the previous term. The STEP Standards descriptors were regularly reviewed by the Committees.</p> <p><i>Action: Finance and Operations Committee to review the STEP Standard descriptors that are assigned to them, in the Autumn term. (CFOO)</i></p> <p>Trustees agreed that going forward risks would be managed by a greater focus on the STEP Standard at Committee level, and that the risk register would be considered as needed by Finance and Operations Committee.</p> <p>Q: The recent pandemic had not been included as a risk to the Trust but had the current risk structure been helpful at this time?</p> <p>A: The schools had closed with very short notice. It had been the responsibility of the schools to follow the Government's guidance and to support the children with home learning. The schools had also been able to provide additional support to other schools outside of the Trust at short notice. The current risk management structure had been very effective during this time, particularly in terms of operational management.</p>
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The Chair thanked BM for providing an overview of the risk management process. He also thanked the Executive Team for the progress in developing the operational and educational reporting standards to the Board.

STEP Up – We all succeed together

13 Financial Management and Monitoring

Finance and Operations Committee

AF, Vice-Chair of the Finance and Operations Committee, provided an update on the key areas to note from the meeting held on 26 March 2020.

At the meeting, a high level financial summary had been provided against the budget. In terms of the impact of Covid 19, the Committee had been reassured to hear that the impact of the closure of the schools had been carefully monitored. The costs associated with the initial response had been absorbed within the existing budgets. There would be limited cash flow impact on the Trust while the schools were closed and some potential cost savings would be made from not employing agency staff during this period. The Committee was confident that the Trust remained in a strong financial position and that any budget savings made during this time would be redirected to support the children. The Committee had also received the 2020/21 budget priorities and were confident that a plan was in place to ensure that this was carried forward.

Q: It was not the intention of the DfE to claw back any money from the schools for free school meals. Could we keep track of any additional costs related to Covid 19?

A: Guidance from DfE and ESFA was due but it was unlikely that STEP would be able to claim for any costs that arose from Covid 19. This was because it seemed that DfE/ESFA would only consider claims if a school/MAT could evidence overall financial loss via a reduction in reserves, and STEP had forecasted an increase in reserves. The Finance Team would closely monitor the situation.

STEP Management Accounts

Trustees reviewed the STEP Management Accounts. BM provided a summary of STEP's in-year financial position as at 29 February 2020. He also provided an update on the impact of Covid 19 on the Trust's financial position.

Discussions on the STEP Management Accounts were recorded in the confidential minutes.

Significant Items of Expenditure

Trustees considered the high value transactions (over £20k) as recommended by the Finance and Operations Committee. Trustees approved the following transactions:

- The procurement of commercial insurance through Zurich for a further three-year term, at a cost of £121,192.
- The appointment of Premier Roofing to undertake roofing works at Turnham and Gonville Academies, at a cost of £90,295.
- To enter into vehicle lease with Bentley Walker for a five-year term, at a cost of £36,824 per annum for the next 5 years.

Trustees noted that the August 2019/20 Return was submitted to the EFA by 31 January 2020.

	<p>The Chair thanked the CFOO for providing excellent financial reports to the Board of Trustees.</p>
<p>14</p>	<p><u>Educational Standards and Performance</u></p> <p>NS, Chair of the Education Committee, advised that the Education Committee on 26 March 2020 had been postponed. A meeting would be held with the DCEO to go through the data.</p> <p>A summary of the key areas to note from the meeting held on 15 January 2020 was provided. An update on the outcomes for the PPG and Disadvantaged pupils across the Trust was provided.</p> <p>Overall, the disadvantaged pupils had performed very well across the Trust. The outcomes for the disadvantaged children in the East Sussex schools, particularly in reading, were still a major concern for the Trust. The strategy for these schools and the use of the PPG funding continued to be carefully reviewed. The Trust also continued to work on the performance of the SEND pupils. A leader had been appointed to quality assure the SEND provision across the Trust.</p> <p>Following Trustees’ requests, the STEP Standards Heat Map had been updated to show whether the STEP Standard score had gone up or down since the previous evaluation cycle.</p> <p>A talent mapping process had also been carried out to show the gender and diversity of the talent across the different schools within the Trust.</p> <p>There were no major safeguarding updates to report. The Executive Team had provided regular safeguarding updates since the school closures. The Committee was reassured that the Trust and the schools had put in place a robust plan for safeguarding staff, vulnerable pupils and their families.</p> <p>Finally, a decision had been made to align the STEP term dates across the Trust and to extend the October half term from one to two weeks.</p> <p>The Chair thanked NS for her report.</p> <p><i>NS left the meeting.</i></p>
<p>STEP Way – We agree to do things like this</p>	
<p>15</p>	<p><u>STEP Governance</u></p> <p><u>Board of Trustees</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the updates to the Governance Action Plan, following the Board Development session on 30 September 2019).</p> <p><u>Trustees’ and Chair of Governors’ Forum</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the minutes of the Trustees’ and Chair of Governors’ Forum held on 13 February 2020.</p> <p><u>Academy Committees</u></p>

	<p>PG provided an update on the Academy Committees. The Benedict Academy Committee Chair of Governors would be confirmed in due course and approved as a Chair’s action. Park Academy would join the Applegarth and Tudor Academy Committee on an interim basis. Westbridge Academy would join the Gonville and Heathfield Academy Committee on an interim basis. The existing Chair of Governors for Westbridge Academy would be appointed as a STEP Governor to ensure consistency and stability when the school joined the Trust.</p> <p>Trustees agreed that it was important to remain flexible to ensure the right level of governance within the new schools joining the trust. Trustees approved the STEP Governor appointments as set out in the paper. Any further Governor appointments would be approved as a Chair’s action.</p> <p>Trustees discussed and approved the amalgamation of the Hailsham Academy Committees from 1 September 2020.</p> <p>Trustees noted that the Spring term Academy Committee meetings had been cancelled due to Covid 19.</p> <p><u>Training</u></p> <p>The safeguarding and safer recruitment training report was noted.</p> <p>The latest Octavo training schedule was also noted. Trustees were encouraged to identify any training required and to advise the Clerk.</p> <p>The following Summer term governor training dates were noted:</p> <p>Panels: Exclusions/ Complaints/ Disciplinary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 17 June 2020 at 6.00pm - Heathfield Academy - 24 June 2020 at 6.00pm - High Cliff Academy
16	<p><u>Policies and Procedures</u></p> <p>Trustees reviewed and approved the following policies and procedures:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attendance Policy • Parental Leave Policy • Managing Change Policy • Support Staff Capability Procedure • Support Staff Maternity/ Paternity Leave Policy • Teacher Capability Procedure • Teachers Maternity/ Paternity Leave Policy
17	<p><u>Safeguarding</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the termly safeguarding report. The report on the Trust’s decisions and considerations during the global pandemic was also noted.</p>

	Trustees thanked the Executive Team for the regular safeguarding updates since the school closures.
18	<u>Complaints</u> The report setting out the complaints dealt with across the Trust during the Autumn and Spring terms was noted. The Complaints Policy had been revised to ensure that the Executive Team were involved in resolving the complaints at a much earlier stage.
19	<u>Signing of Legal Documentation</u> Trustees noted the documentation signed by the Company Secretary, CEO or Chair of Trustees since the previous meeting. The CEO had signed Annex G Declarations for the auditors in relation to mid-year funding.
20	<u>Correspondence to the Chair and Chair's Actions</u> There had been no correspondence received by the Chair since the last meeting. RV advised that the Complaints Policy had been revised and approved as a Chair's action. Trustees ratified the Complaints Policy.
21	<u>Any Other Business</u> There were no other matters of business to report.
22	<u>Meeting Impact</u> The Trustees thanked the Executive Team and the STEP staff, for all they had done to support the children and families. They were pleased to hear that the Trust remained in a strong financial position and were confident that any budget savings made during this time would be redirected to support the children. They were also reassured to hear that the safeguarding of children and staff continued to be a priority during this challenging time. The Executive Team thanked the Trustees for their continued support. The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting by video conference.
23	<u>Date of Next Meeting</u> The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on Monday, 20 July 2020 at 6.30pm. The academy visits in Hailsham would be rescheduled in due course.
24	<u>Confidential Matters</u> Confidential discussions on strategic and financial matters were recorded in the confidential minutes.

Action List	
Action	Owner
Overview of leadership support and structure to be circulated to Trustees.	DCEO
Review the 2020-21 STEP Compass Priorities in the light of the current crisis.	CEO
Finance and Operations Committee to review the STEP Standard descriptors that are assigned to them, in the Autumn term.	CFOO

Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting	
Chair's signature	
Chair's name	
Date	