

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees**  
**Board Development Session**  
**Monday, 28 September 2020 at 2.00pm (Virtual)**

Name	Position	Attendance
<b>Trustees</b>		
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	Present
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Absent (Apologies Accepted)
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (for items 1-5)
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present
<b>Executive Team</b>		
Jennese Alozie (JA)	Director of Effectiveness and Performance	Present
Paul Glover (PG)	Deputy CEO	Present
John Halliwell (JH)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
James Hooper (JH)	Director of Operations	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present
Tim Mills (TM)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
<b>Other</b>		
Philippa Jackson	Governance Clerk	Present
Adrian Rogers	CEO Chiltern Learning Trust	Present (for item 5)

<b>1</b>	<p><b><u>Welcome and Apologies</u></b></p> <p>RV, Chair of the Board of Trustees, welcomed Trustees and the Executive team members to the meeting. Apologies had been received from RN (work commitment).</p> <p>The Chair extended a particular welcome to AR, CEO Chiltern Learning Trust, who had kindly agreed to present to the Trustees later in the meeting for the STEP Ahead session.</p>
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**2**     **2020-21 Strategic Priorities**

The CEO shared some thoughts on how the Executive Team worked together. The way the team operated had changed over time, as the Trust had evolved. Using, “Five Dysfunctions of a Team” by Patrick Lencioni, the Executive Team had reflected on how effectively they worked together, leading to some important changes. Because the team was well established, and confidence levels in each other were generally high, there was a consensus that sometimes there was not enough challenge in meetings. An example of this related to finance. This area of the organisation had largely been seen as an exclusive area of responsibility for the CFOO. Instead, now it was seen as the responsibility of the whole Executive Team; a fundamental shift which had led to high quality, strategic discussions. Changes had also been made to the structure of the Executive Team meetings so that challenge was encouraged, indeed expected.

MD explained that the two biggest challenges for the Trust were Covid 19, and anti-racism and equality. However, the team had also identified five other key challenges which were likely to dominate their attention. Although the responsibility of the whole Executive Team, each member had oversight of one. MD then asked each member of the Executive Team to briefly outline the priorities.

Covid 19 and School Reopening Strategy

The DCEO explained that the Executive Team had always been able to look back at the decisions they had made and reviewed the outcome and success of these decisions. They felt the strategy for reopening the STEP schools had worked well and allowed the confidence to build within the communities.

The following points were highlighted:

- 92-93% of the children had returned to school in September
- Each Academy had been required to use the Spring term data to get a sense of where each child would be at the end of the Summer term
- The 2019/20 outcomes indicated yet another year of improvement across the Trust
- The 2019/20 Trust wide KS2 Combined was 79% (compared to 77% last year)
- The same target setting process, using the Fischer Family Trust, would be used for this year and these would be shared with the Education Committee
- The children had returned back to school exceptionally well
- All schools were currently open with the exception of Tudor where one part of the school had been closed due to a Covid outbreak
- Remote learning had been put in place for those children who could not be in school

Trustees had made a number of suggestions regarding the oversight of safeguarding at Board level. It had been noted that safeguarding across the Trust was very strong but further considerations could be given to how safeguarding data could be dealt with centrally to give more visibility at Board level. The DCEO reassured Trustees that a focus would be placed on this area going forward.

## Finance

The CFOO provided an update on finance:

- The accountability for finance had changed last year
- A new process for making Headteachers and Heads of Schools responsible for the budget process had been introduced through the performance management process
- Structured meetings with the Business Advisors had also been introduced to make them aware of their responsibilities
- There was a high degree of risk with managing the savings targets
- The targets were easy to understand in terms of performance indicators but were difficult to reach
- The responsibility of the savings targets had been split over the Executive Team
- The targets were reviewed regularly and progress had been made.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: How were the savings targets set and divided between the schools and services? How would the targets help protect the education of the children?

A: Within the budget setting process, savings targets were agreed with the Heads. The 74% staffing target was included as an objective and discussed as part of the performance management process. Savings targets could be shared across groups of academies which allowed staff to be shared across the group.

Q: Had there been any additional significant Covid related expenses and how would these look against the funding?

A: The additional expenses looked poor for the PPE and cleaning budgets but not in the overall approach to funding. The benefit of the 'STEP First' approach ensured that a whole school approach had been taken to cleaning within the schools so staffing costs in this area were minimal.

Q: Was there anything that the Board of Trustees could do to raise these additional costs and issues with the DfE?

A: Potentially Trustees could provide some challenge on this. The Trust also had a number of pupils who could not access home learning and IT facilities which was a big issue. This could be looked at in more detail by the Finance and Operations Committee.

## Educational Outcomes and Performance

The Executive Director of Primary (TM) provided an overview of the current position of the Trust's educational results and performance. He emphasised that STEP was now considered to be a maturing and confident MAT in terms of its educational results and performance. It was important to consider whether the outcomes really represented what we wanted from the children when they left the Trust. He explained to Trustees that there were other elements of education and more qualitative outcomes to pursue as the Trust grew rather than just the KS2 outcomes.

Trustees raised some initial thoughts and questions including:

- Would this be a shift in qualitative based measurement to change the overall measurement? How could this be interpreted?
- It would require a longer term shift in the education community on how the Trust judged itself
- The qualitative measurements for the Board to judge the performance of the Trust could better reflect the overall work of the Trust, rather than just quantitative measurements
- There were already some elements of qualitative measurement in place, in terms of measuring Pupil Voice, which was something that could be considered in more detail by the Education Committee
- Someone had previously seen a charter/ promise to the children, for example relating to cultural or artistic experiences
- It would be important for STEP to capture what they wanted for their children beyond the current educational milestones.
- It could be built into the values of the Trust, for example the desires for the young people leaving the Trust in terms of their confidence and independence
- One particular Trust, had a 10x10 commitment, which was tailored to the cultural capital of the children (10 experiences by the age of 10)
- In some of the recent school visits, Headteachers had talked about what it looked like to be a STEP pupil and they felt that there were some opportunities for Trust wide initiatives.

#### Governance

The Director of Effectiveness and Performance provided a brief overview of the governance priorities for the year. She raised the following key points:

- The recent focus on governance found that the Heads and the Academy Committee Chairs had developed a strong relationship since the Covid 19 lockdown
- With the continued focus on governance this year, the relationship between the Heads and the other Academy Committee Members would be developed
- Drawing on governor training sessions, the STEP Compass Priorities and the Academy Improvement Plans, key priorities had been identified for each layer of governance to ensure a clear thread throughout the different levels
- The focus for this year would be on collective responsibility across the Trust
- The Trust had piloted the amalgamation of one Academy Committee over four of the Hailsham Academies. This would initially be for a trial period of one year (with a mid-year review) with the intention of making the amalgamation permanent, if the trial was successful
- A STEP Way for governance and a clear training plan would be put in place to create an expectation in behaviours and conduct of governance for this stage of the Trust's development.

#### Leadership and Development

The Executive Director of Primary (JH) provided an update on the Trust's leadership and development priorities. He raised the following points:

- Training and development, talent mapping and succession planning continued to be developed within the Trust
- The STEP Ahead Teaching School would look at developing staff at the early stages of their careers
- As the Trust grew, the focus would be on leadership capacity and the next layer of Senior Leaders and Executive Leaders
- The training and coaching opportunities would be carefully considered due to the lack of face to face contact this year
- The finance and budget priorities were an issue and these would be reviewed and prioritised over the year
- The anti-racism and equality element would be incorporated into the training programme and BAME and gender balance would also be considered as part of this programme.

### Growth

The Director of Operations provided a brief update on the key priorities in this area and raised the following points:

- New schools joining the Trust often required a high amount of Executive Team resource
- To increase capacity, the Executive Team would identify ways to incorporate the process of conversion/ transfer of new academies, as part of STEP Way
- This links well with the priority around leadership, enabling senior leaders to take greater responsibility for the process of transfer and integration
- Assessing cultural fit, alignment with STEP's moral purpose and the impact of any findings from due diligence continued to be the responsibility of the Board and Executive Team.

RV thanked the Executive team for their presentations.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: The Trust had grown in confidence and capability within the sector and this has been demonstrated through the performance tables and Ofsted. Was there an opportunity to now think beyond this and to take the Trust further forward in the sector?

A: There were lots of opportunities to use the resources and staff capacity to move the Trust forward.

Q: Was there a process for prioritising the seven elements or would the individual Executive Team members take responsibility to drive their specific areas forward?

A: There was no individual responsibility for each element. The Executive Team had not considered the prioritisation of each strand but we could take this away and consider where prioritisation would be required.

### 3 Anti-Racism and Equality

The Director of Effectiveness and Performance introduced this item. She provided an overview of what anti-racism meant for the Trust, how it would be explored and the strands that formed the debate. She emphasised that it was important to consider what anti-racism and equality meant for the STEP communities and stakeholders and where that thinking came from. The ideas to form the debate should come from within the Trust and not from the top but to also join up with others to ensure change and development.

The Executive Team had recently received a presentation from an external leader on unconscious bias, the root causes of anti-racism, how this existed in organisations and how this could be explored further.

The Director of Primary (JH) provided an update under the STEP Compass Priorities in the areas of recruitment and retention, leadership and professional development, the curriculum and safeguarding.

JA summarised the presentation by explaining that a strategic plan would be created with input from Trustees. The intention was to engage in dialogue with external services and partners across STEP to consider what was best practice and how this could be shaped to fit the Trust. The strategic plan would be part of the overall cycle of improvement with a 3-5 year timeline.

JA explained to Trustees that the dialogue at Board level was an important part of developing the strategic plan. She reminded Trustees that they held a duty to engage in dialogue to help shape the lives of the STEP children and communities. She invited Trustees to draw on their own experiences, expertise and ambitions to inform the debate. The following comments, questions and experiences were shared by Trustees:

- All organisations were going through similar challenges. Trustees were pleased to hear that the Trust was looking at this over the longer term. Could Trustees consider the outcomes and cultural aspects needed to make the changes? I would be happy to share my experiences and work from my current role with STEP as part of the journey.
- Some sort of measurement/ targets around the actions would be useful to have in place, for example to improve recruitment and diversity targets in the Trust's leadership teams.
- I had not experienced much of this within my current role/ organisation. I would hope that more tangible outcomes/ actions would come out of this work.
- Termly reporting should be provided to the Board to evaluate the progress within each area/ strand.
- The Chair of Trustees shared some diversity data on the Trust which could be used as some sort of measurement over time. It was suggested that additional data be collected on Academy Leaders and Operational Leaders.
- It was encouraging to hear the long term strategic view of the Trust. Within the Trust that I am part of, a lot of work had been done on the global curriculum, with a specific focus on the history of untold stories in the communities across the Trust. I would be happy to share these with you.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Channel 4 programme ‘The School That Tried to End Racism’ was referred to. This particular school had considered the actual teaching elements of anti-racism rather than just the representation element.</li> <li>• In relation to the STEP diversity data, could the BAME category be broken down further given the make-up of the STEP schools?</li> <li>• When developing the strategic plan, could we consider proactively engaging the STEP community? I could refer you to a number of contacts and consultancies to engage with in relation to BAME issues.</li> <li>• It would be useful for the Trust to set some BAME performance measures at the Board of Trustees meeting in December and to report to Trustees on the progress against these measures</li> </ul> <p>The CEO thanked Trustees for their feedback. He explained that the Senior Leadership Team had been asked to talk through some key areas with their teams and provide feedback to the Executive team. A further meeting would be held with Senior Leaders to talk through the ideas gathered from staff across the Trust before defining any actions for the strategic plan. Performance measures would be identified to ensure the success of the longer term strategy. The strategic plan would be presented to the Board of Trustees at the meeting in December.</p> <p><b>Action: Review STEP diversity data to ensure representative sample. Include Academy Leaders and Operational Leaders in the data. (Chair of Trustees)</b></p> <p><b>Action: Present anti-racism and diversity strategic plan, including targets, at December Board meeting. (Executive Team)</b></p>
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**STEP Ahead – We invest in our future**

4	<p><b><u>2020-2025 Business Plan</u></b></p> <p>This presentation was deferred to the Board of Trustees meeting on 6 October 2020.</p>
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There was a break in the meeting.

5	<p><b><u>Growth – Issues Facing a Mixed Phase MAT</u></b></p> <p><i>AR joined the meeting.</i></p> <p>The CEO welcomed and introduced AR, CEO of Chiltern Learning Trust (CLT), thanking him for taking the time to speak to Trustees today. They had met at the MAT CEO Programme and had worked together as part of the mentoring group. He explained that CLT was a successful mixed MAT and was a parallel of STEP Academy Trust in terms of its values.</p> <p>AR thanked Trustees for inviting him, stating that he was always happy to share his experiences with Trustees, as he understood how much of a commitment the role involved. AR shared some slides with Trustees which outlined his background and his role, an overview of the Trust and the schools, CLT vision and expectations, central team structure and ethos and the differences in primary and secondary education.</p> <p><i>NS left the meeting.</i></p>
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At the conclusion of his presentation, AR invited questions from Trustees:

Q: Would you do anything different?

A: I would have placed greater focus on the grade 1 schools. I would have also centralised social media and communications activities to remove these responsibilities from the schools whilst building the Trust, and taking more control over the secondary marketing narrative.

Q: Was the improvement model for primary and secondary consistent?

A: Yes. We did exactly the same for primary and secondary and I would be happy to share this model with you.

Q: Do the primary and secondary leaders meet across the Trust?

A: Yes, quite frequently. We work together on leadership every half term.

Q: The secondary finance culture could take a long time to change. How did you do this and who was responsible?

A: AR provided some examples of how the Trust engaged the Heads and encouraged staff collaboration in this area.

Q: Was the central marketing function in place from the outset or was it a more recent function? Was it proactive or reactive?

A: Within the first year of joining the Trust, a full time Marketing Officer was employed who shared the Trust's ambitions and ethos. The communications strategy was then implemented within the schools.

Q: How did you reconcile the balance of business and the life chances of the children? It was important for Trustees to always consider the business choices being made and the level of moral judgement.

A: AR provided some examples of the approaches taken in different areas of CLT which had saved the schools money. He provided some examples of savings in comparison to other MATs in terms of the central team staffing, CPD, teaching school, marketing and recruitment

Q: Did you have design principles that directed the overall structure of the Trust?

A: We shared benchmarking principles with all governors and schools to show that the money had been spent on the schools and the children. The benchmarking and value for money information was regularly provided to the governing bodies. In some cases, we had used the Trust's reserves for the children in schools which had a financial notice for improvement. There was a tight framework on Headteacher wages.

Q: Could you offer any advice on how STEP could prepare for moving into secondary education in advance, in terms of shifting ways of working or working practices?

A: I would advise that you looked for a good secondary school and consider recruiting the Head on a consultancy basis if possible. You need a Head that shares the Trust's values and has the credibility and courage to progress the school.

AR thanked Trustees for inviting him. The Chair thanked AR for his interesting presentation and input into the session. He commented that STEP was a supportive and co-operative MAT and would be happy to support or share knowledge with CLT if they required. Trustees thanked AR again for his presentation.

	<i>AR left the meeting.</i>
<b>6</b>	<p><b><u>Closing Comments</u></b></p> <p>Trustees considered this to have been a very positive session. They found it very interesting to hear about CLT’s approach to the differences in primary and secondary education and valued the feedback on how some of the issues had been overcome.</p> <p>Trustees added that it was important for the Board to continue to ensure that the children were at the centre of their focus and discussions. They recognised that STEP was a maturing Trust that achieved great results and continued to look for ways to evolve and succeed.</p>
<b>7</b>	<p><b><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></b></p> <p>The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on 6 October 2020 at 5.00pm (Virtual). BB sent his apologies for the meeting.</p>

<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>
Review STEP diversity data to ensure representative sample. Include Academy Leaders and Operational Leaders in the data.	Chair of Trustees
Present anti-racism and diversity strategic plan, including targets, at December Board meeting.	Executive Team

<b>Signed as a true and accurate record of the meeting</b>	
<b>Chair’s signature</b>	
<b>Chair’s name</b>	
<b>Date</b>	