

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees
Held on Thursday 1 April 2021 at 5.15pm (Virtual)**

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)	Present (for items 1-7)
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (for items 1-7)
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present
Attendees		
Jennese Alozie (JA)	Director of Effectiveness and Performance	Present (for items 1-16)
Tom Garry (TG)	Head of STEP Ahead Teaching School	Present (for items 1-16)
Paul Glover (PG)	Deputy CEO	Absent (apologies accepted)
John Halliwell (JH)	Executive Director of Primary	Present (for items 1-16)
James Hooper (JHo)	Director of Operations	Present (for items 1-16)
Philippa Jackson (PJ)	Senior Governance Clerk	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present (for items 1-16)
Tim Mills (TM)	Executive Director of Primary	Present (for items 1-16)

1	<p><u>Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping</u></p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. There had been some connection issues with the Trust Governor and Trustees were unable to access the papers through the system. The Clerk had recirculated the papers by email, including a confidential AOB item on psychometric testing.</p> <p>Apologies were received and accepted from PG (family commitment). RG and NS would need to leave the meeting at 6.30pm.</p>
2	<p><u>Quorum</u></p> <p>The Clerk declared the meeting quorate.</p>
3	<p><u>Review of Pecuniary and Conflicts Interests</u></p> <p>There were no pecuniary or other potential conflicts of interest declared.</p>

	Trustees confirmed there were no changes to their personal and pecuniary interests on the Trust Governor system.
4	<p><u>Minutes</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Board of Trustees meetings held on 17 December 2020 and 8 February 2021 were approved.</p>
5	<p><u>Matters Arising from Previous Meetings</u></p> <p>An update was provided on the outstanding actions from previous meetings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seek advice in relation to the Coronavirus vaccination and discuss with Executive Team: Advice had been received from HR and ACAS. Storing data on whether staff had received the vaccine would be incredibly complex and problematic and was not recommended. • Benchmark gender pay gap data across the sector: To be presented to the Board of Trustees in the Summer term. • Develop and hold team building session for Board of Trustees: On hold and would be facilitated when able to do so in a physical setting.
STEP First – We are all one team	
6	<p><u>CEO Strategic Report</u></p> <p>MD explained that a verbal CEO report would be provided this term, given that there had been a comprehensive update at the interim Board of Trustees meeting on 8 February. He explained that a decision had been taken not to proceed with the termly STEP Standards provision as, due to current circumstances, little was expected to change in terms of scores. Additionally, it was felt to be an unnecessary burden to place on academy leaders at this time.</p> <p><u>School reopening/ Covid 19</u></p> <p>Trustees noted a briefing paper on the full return to schools as of 8 March 2021 following the Government advice for all schools to return.</p> <p>JA provided an update on the school reopening/ Covid 19 and highlighted the following key points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The return to school focused on settling the children back into a routine, a review of the on-line provision, mental health and wellbeing and moving forward to the Summer term • Pupil attendance was at 93% at the beginning of March and was currently 96% • 16 staff were still shielding • Persistent Absence was low in all academies and a 2-weekly analysis of this was carried out to ensure that actions were taken • Work on the curriculum continued and the wider curriculum, Maths and English would be prioritised for the Summer term • The academy websites had all the necessary information for remote learning and provision was in place for all children, including those still accessing planned learning remotely.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: Was there a view on additional learning or are you still awaiting Government guidance on this?

A: We would not make any decisions on this until an update was received from the Government. Currently the time in school would be used to address gaps in learning and provide comprehensive learning. We accept it could take 18 months for the children to get to the position where they should be. The gaps in learning would be identified and the children would get the additional support.

Q: It was good to hear that the broader curriculum would be a priority for the Summer term. Could you explain further how you would ensure a broader approach for those children who needed the additional support? Would a Trust wide approach be taken on this?

A: The Executive Directors carried out a range of baseline assessment that focused on the breadth of the curriculum and to identify key gaps in learning. The balance between PSHE, health and well-being and academic learning would continue to be ensured by the Executive Directors. It was important to maintain the core balance already in place and to prioritise specific learning in the curriculum.

Q: Had there been many bubble closures since the schools reopened?

A: Not many. There were 3-4 bubbles closures at the beginning but nothing widespread.

Roadmap to Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation

JH shared the Anti-Racism Roadmap (culture). At the December Board meeting, Trustees had received a presentation on the Roadmap Towards STEP Becoming an Anti-Racist Organisation. The first draft of the Roadmap had been developed with the view to launch in January '21 but the Executive Team had taken the decision to defer the launch of STEP's Roadmap in lockdown.

JH reported that since the last update, work on the Roadmap had continued. It included strategic and operational actions and milestones for tackling racism and promoting greater diversity within the organisation. JH summarised the objectives of the overall Roadmap which included:

- Vision and Values: Anti-racist approaches are systemic; known, understood and enacted by all STEP staff, Governors, Trustees and Members.
- Training and Development: Training and development systems and protocols are in place that promote a culture of anti-racism across the organisation.
- Leadership and Recruitment: There is a diverse workforce across the organisation, including all levels of leadership and governance.
- Curriculum Development: Curricula are designed to promote anti-racism and reflect the diversity of the communities STEP serves.
- Policies and Systems: All policies and systems have been reviewed and adapted to reflect the Trust's anti-racist stance.

The Roadmap had been presented to the Senior Leadership Team in March with the view to launch at the end of April. Training slides had also been developed for staff to deliver training to their teams. A 'visual' has been developed to articulate the initial 'Culture' stage of the journey. The image reflected the key steps and actions to focus on becoming an anti-racist organisation and to help everyone understand how they could evaluate themselves. It was hoped that the image could be displayed in the academies and provide further guidance for communities.

MD commented that the next steps were to share the Roadmap with the parents and wider community. A Newsletter would go out in May to celebrate the 10 year anniversary of STEP Academy Trust and would also include the launch of the Roadmap, Teaching School Hub and CEO succession.

Trustees raised the following questions:

Q: Had feedback been received from the community on anti-racism?

A: Some initial feedback had been received when we first made our statement following the events in America. We had received a lot of support from parents and a few emails in relation to 'every life matters'. We need to be aware that some of the South London academies were in significant large black communities. A lot of STEP families live with this but have not necessarily provided feedback. It was important to reflect one's self and the wider Trust perspective. This would be a long journey to travel for all of us.

Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their work on developing the Roadmap. They felt that the 'visual' had been well developed and would make this stage of the journey easy to understand both internally and externally. They were pleased to see how this clearly linked to other aspects of the Trust's safeguarding culture.

Executive Head Appointments

Interviews had taken place for Executive Head roles. JM had been appointed Executive Headteacher of the Hailsham Academies and AE had been appointed Executive Headteacher of Benedict and David Livingstone Academies. Further interviews would take place next term to ensure another layer of fixed Executive leadership across the Trust.

Trustees congratulated JM and AE on their recent appointments.

STEP Newsletter

The STEP Newsletter would go out next term featuring the CEO and to notify of his retirement and the CEO succession plans in place.

Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their very helpful updates.

Confidential discussions on funding and strategic issues were recorded in the confidential minutes.

STEP Ahead – We invest in our future

7 STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub

TG shared some slides on the STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub. He provided an update on the DfE recruitment and retention strategy, the Institute of Teaching (ITT), the geographical area and remit of the hub, partnerships within the Hub, Early Career Framework (ECF) and National Professional Qualifications (NPQ) model and key headlines, KPI's, ITT offer, Appropriate Body (AB) work for induction, additional CPD to schools in the area and support for STEP Academies.

Trustees thanked TG for his presentation and raised the following questions:

	<p>Q: Would we offer something to support our commitment to diversity and anti-racism? It felt very top down from the providers. How much freedom would you have to meet the specific needs of the community of the Trust?</p> <p>A: There were elements of diversity and anti-racism across the Teaching School. We had collaborated on three particular projects in West Sussex which focused on BAME, LGBT and Women. There were some benefits to a top down approach which included early training and NPQ's and considerable expertise in delivering high quality CPD. We were aware of the big gaps in English and Maths in primary and were confident in this important area of focus.</p> <p>Q: Would there be any big challenges in the area? Would any potential recruitment be needed for future delivery?</p> <p>A: The main challenge would be to build relationships, particularly in the Brighton and Hove area which was not currently part of STEP. We would need to build communications around this and meet with representatives from both Local Authorities to talk about our offer. We would also need to build relationships with the network of schools in the area to encourage schools to move over to STEP. The Executive Team had considered the structure of the team and were aware that the size of the team may increase slightly over time. We were confident in the way that we trained and would have sufficient capacity to support the STEP academies that needed it.</p> <p>Q: Are there any areas where particular expertise were required?</p> <p>A: We should be able to cover this using our existing networks. There was a huge amount of expertise in these areas to be shared with the Hub. We hope to work with the networks and buy in expertise. We particularly want to build the ITT area and grow this offer.</p> <p><i>TG, RG and NS left the meeting.</i></p>
<p>8</p>	<p><u>STEP Compass Priorities 2021/22</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the proposed STEP Compass Priorities and the key themes for 2021/22. The following questions were raised:</p> <p>Q: Do we have a commitment to avoid pupil exclusions?</p> <p>A; We do not take the position to never exclude a pupil. Sometimes this was necessary in certain circumstances. We continue to talk about the quality of teaching to meet the needs of the children. We do not have high rates of exclusions across the Trust. We worked on what sat behind the child's behaviour and what was required to support that child. Priority was given to understanding the child's needs and exclusion was a last resort. Any changes in exclusion numbers would be reported to the Education Committee.</p>
<p>9</p>	<p><u>Appraisal Review</u></p> <p><i>Confidential discussions on the appraisal process review were recorded in the confidential minutes.</i></p>

10 Financial Management and Monitoring

STEP Management Accounts

The STEP Management Accounts and in-year financial position as at 28 February 2021 was noted. The Finance and Operations Committee had felt that at the halfway point of 2020/21, the Trust was in a strong financial position which showed the impact of the work in delivering the savings targets and budget challenges. The savings target of £724k was on track to be achieved. This was a testament to STEP First.

Significant Items of Expenditure

Trustees approved the following significant items of expenditure:

- The project budget allocated for works to resurface the EYFS areas at Gonville Academy increased to £27,276
- The project budget allocated for the purpose of installing a daily mile track and outdoor gym equipment at High Cliff Academy of £32,000

2019/2020 Return

BM confirmed that the August 2019/2020 Return was submitted to the ESFA by 20 January 2021.

Update from Finance and Operations Committee – 24 March 2021

RN reported that the Committee had acknowledged the significant amount of work carried out by Senior Leaders and Executive Team to deliver the savings targets and budget requirements for this year. The Committee also recognised that the Trust was in a strong position to make the proposed longer term financial changes for the benefit of the children.

Risk Trustee

RG would meet with the Executive Team to discuss the scope and purpose of the Risk Trustee role and an update would be provided to the Finance and Operations Committee at the next meeting.

11 Educational Standards and Performance

NS reported that the Education Committee scheduled for 29 March 2021 had been cancelled. She had confirmed that between the February interim Board meeting and the children returning last week, there was very little to update the Committee on which had not been covered at today's Board meeting.

Trustees noted the STEP Standards for Remote Education.

12 Academy Engagement

RV's visit to Westbridge Academy had been postponed due lockdown and would be rescheduled when appropriate. RN's safeguarding visit to the Hailsham Academies had been postponed until May.

All Trustees were encouraged to arrange school visits when appropriate to do so and to contact the Clerk who would facilitate these visits.

Action: Set out expectations of Academy link trustee role. (CEO and Chair of Trustees)

STEP Way – We agree to do things like this

13 Governance

Articles of Association/ Scheme of Delegation

Trustees noted the proposed changes to the Articles of Association and proposed that the STEP Members pass the Special Resolution.

Academy Committees

The minutes of the Spring Term Academy Committee meetings were noted.

Trustees approved the STEP Governor appointments as set out in the report.

JA provided some feedback on the amalgamation of the Hailsham AC from 1 September 2020. The amalgamated AC was going well and work had been done to ensure that all AC members had a clear understanding of the Scheme of Delegation and the remit of the AC. The model worked well in Hailsham as not all four schools were considered vulnerable and had received recent Ofsted inspections. The Hailsham AC would continue to be monitored and would be fully evaluated at the end of the year. Trustees noted that the amalgamated model may not work so well with a more vulnerable group of schools that were in a different position.

Training

The bi annual AC Chairs' and Trustees' forum would be held on 22 April 2021. The Governor training session would be held on 23 June 2021. The team building session for the Board of Trustees would be considered when it was appropriate to meet in person.

Action: Review the training required for Trustees. (Chair of Trustees and Clerk)

14 Policies and Procedures

Trustees considered and approved the following policies:

- Nursery and Early Years Home Visits Policy
- Modern Slavery Statement

Trustees ratified the following policies approved by the Finance and Operations Committee on 24 March 2021:

- Executive Group Pay Policy
- Communications Policy
- Critical Incident and Business Continuity Plan including Lockdown Policy template

15	<p><u>Safeguarding</u></p> <p>It was noted that the safeguarding updates had been presented earlier in the meeting in the Covid/ Return to school briefing.</p> <p>Q: Do we need to consider as a Board of Trustees the recent peer on peer abuse? A: Peer on peer abuse featured in our safeguarding policies and was part of the safeguarding curriculum. We would ensure that any disclosures of this nature were reported. We were confident that if these issues arose we had the safeguarding policies and procedures and Designated Safeguarding Leads within the academies in place to deal with this.</p> <p>RN, Safeguarding Lead Trustee, reassured Trustees that he was confident that the safeguarding systems were in place across the Trust to deal with this. He felt that the Board of Trustees should be prepared for an increase in public interest in peer on peer abuse and for child disclosures in the STEP academies.</p>
16	<p><u>Complaints</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the summary of complaints dealt with across the Trust during the Spring term.</p>
<i>The Executive Team (except the CEO left the meeting)</i>	
STEP Ahead – We invest in our future	
17	<p><u>CEO Succession Plans</u></p> <p><i>Confidential discussions on succession planning were recorded in the confidential minutes.</i></p>
18	<p><u>Signing of Legal Documentation</u></p> <p>The legal documents signed by the Company Secretary/CEO/CFOO/Chair since the previous meeting were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved Deed of Confidentiality in relation to sharing Telscombe data electronically. (CEO/Chair on 25/1/2021)
19	<p><u>Correspondence to the Chair/ Chairs Actions</u></p> <p>There had been no correspondence received by the Chair this term.</p> <p>The following actions taken by the Chair since the last meeting were noted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approved acceptance of charitable donation to Turnham Academy • Approved CEO’s attendance at CST Conference
20	<p><u>Any Other Business</u></p> <p>Q: With regards to the latest Government Green Paper which had proposed moving into partnerships to improve support for children, should we look at how this impacted the Trust? A: We expected an increase in the number of enquiries and we would be clear on how we articulated the Trust. We are prepared for more enquiries.</p>

	<p>Q: Following the discussion on peer on peer abuse in schools, should we take a more pro-active approach to this rather than reactive? A; There should be zero complacency around this issue as this could also affect primary schools. I would suggest that we steer away from a reactive approach to communications. Nothing has changed from the Trust’s perspective as there has always been peer on peer abuse. The Trust’s safeguarding policies and procedures were all in place to deal with this.</p> <p>Q; Could you arrange for the Board of Trustees to receive some pupil voice feedback? A: Yes, we will review this with MC. The staff survey results and actions would also be presented as part of the CEO report in July to provide a broader stakeholder view to Trustees. Action: Arrange for Board of Trustees to receive pupil voice and staff feedback. (CEO)</p> <p>Q; Could you arrange for the new Head of HR to report on improving HR systems and the SCR? A; Yes this could also be arranged. Action: Provide report to Trustees on improving HR systems and the SCR. (Head of HR)</p>
<p>21</p>	<p><u>Meeting Impact</u></p> <p>Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their comprehensive updates at the meeting. They felt that there had been some good discussions and that Trustees had provided challenging questions to the Executive Team. The Executive Team had addressed the key issues and were able to provide reassurance. They had reflected on how there had been a lot of good debates at Committee level and this had fed into the discussions at Board level.</p> <p>Trustees felt that the discussions on equitable funding had been constructive and this was a real area of challenge for the Trustees and Executive Team. However, some Trustees felt that some of the discussions and concerns on equitable funding at the Finance and Operations Committee had not been fully communicated at Board level, particularly the discussions around the phasing and communications of the new funding model. It was hoped that the Executive Team would reflect on the advice and concerns raised by the Committee and bring back to the Board of Trustees.</p> <p>Trustees reflected on how effectively the Executive Team and Senior Leaders worked together which had helped to move the Trust on whilst recovering from Covid. They paid particular credit to the Executive Team this term for developing the Roadmap to becoming an anti-racist organisation.</p> <p>They also thanked TG for his presentation on the STEP Ahead Teaching School Hub. It had been helpful to hear from other leaders across the Trust.</p>
<p>22</p>	<p><u>Date of Next Meeting</u></p> <p>The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on Monday, 19 July 2021 (venue to be agreed).</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone for attending the meeting.</p>

Action List	
Action	Owner
Set out expectations of Academy link trustee role.	CEO and Chair of Trustees
Review the training required for Trustees.	Chair of Trustees and Clerk
Arrange for Board of Trustees to receive pupil voice and staff feedback.	CEO
Provide report to Trustees on improving HR systems and the SCR.	Head of HR

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