

**Minutes of a Meeting of the STEP Board of Trustees
Held on Monday, 18 July 2022 at 5.00pm (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)	Absent (apologies accepted)
Peter Lilford (PL)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rory Nath (RN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Ursula Norbert (UN)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present (for items 1-10)
Navdeep Sanghara (NS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Shelley Stuart (SS)	Non-Executive Trustee	Present
Rama Venchard (RV)	Non-Executive Trustee (Chair of Trustees)	Present
Attendees		
Paul Glover (PG)	Deputy CEO (CEO Designate)	Present
John Halliwell (JHa)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
James Hooper (JHo)	Director of Operations	Present
Philippa Jackson (PJ)	Senior Governance Clerk (Minutes)	Present
Claire Majumdar (CM)	Director of Quality Assurance, Data and Governance	Present
Ben March (BM)	Chief Finance and Operations Officer	Present (except items 13-15)
Tim Mills (TM)	Executive Director of Primary	Present
Merlyn Vlotman (MV)	Head of HR	Present (for confidential items only)

1	<u>Welcome, Apologies and Housekeeping</u> The Chair (RV) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received and accepted from RG (holiday).
2	<u>Quorum</u> The Clerk declared the meeting quorate.
3	<u>Review of Pecuniary and Conflicts Interests</u> There were no pecuniary or other potential conflicts of interest declared. Trustees confirmed they had updated their personal and pecuniary interests on the Trust Governor system.

4	<p><u>Minutes</u></p> <p>The minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting held on 30 March 2022 were approved. The Chair confirmed he would sign a copy of the minutes at the end of the meeting.</p>
5	<p><u>Matters Arising from the Minutes</u></p> <p>Trustees noted the actions from the previous meetings as set out in the agenda.</p>
STEP First – We are all one team	
6	<p><u>Chief Executive Officer’s Report</u></p> <p>The CEO Report for the Spring term was noted.</p> <p>Trustees noted the STEP Standards Heat Map, which showed the Academies’ performance against the Trust’s performance standards.</p> <p>The CEO transition was almost complete. The CEO STEP First visits had been conducted this term in partnership with PG. The visits went well and it was an opportunity to say goodbye to the school leaders and children. The PUPAC values had clearly cultivated a sense of nurture and unity and it was vital that PG and the Executive Team continued to work on this. Although leaders were at a different stage of the journey they were able to articulate unity and understand the STEP Compass. MD wished PG and the Executive Team well for the future.</p>
7	<p><u>STEP Compass Priorities</u></p> <p>The STEP Compass Priorities for 2022/23 were approved.</p>
8	<p><u>Safeguarding</u></p> <p><u>Safeguarding Lead Trustee Report</u></p> <p>The annual safeguarding lead Trustee report had been deferred to next term until CM had spent some more time in her new role and they could discuss some forward looking plans for safeguarding.</p> <p>RN reminded everyone that safeguarding should continue to be prioritised by Trustees. He was confident that the Trust’s safeguarding strategy was exceptionally strong and that all safeguarding practices were in place to protect the safety and wellbeing of the STEP children. He also reminded Trustees that the Trust’s safeguarding culture should remain a priority to ensure that safeguarding practices across all academies remained robust.</p> <p>He was of the belief that the data and insight should be brought to the attention of Trustees to help them understand what was happening within the academies and to make informed decisions. For example, there were currently 450 STEP children on the safeguarding register and 41 with a Child Protection Plan in place and this data was an important part of discussions at Board level. He felt that Trustees would benefit from some additional in-depth and formal safeguarding data reporting.</p>

Q: Was there anything further that Trustees could do to actively support safeguarding?
A: Trustees should always prioritise safeguarding, receive training and challenge the safeguarding strategy in all academies. All staff understood their responsibilities and trustees should hold the Executive Team to account.

Q: How do we ensure that safeguarding was being taken seriously within the academies?
A: There were many different ways. Ensure that all staff receive regular annual training. Discussions on attendance were also important. The Trust-wide attendance was above the national level but continued focus on persistent absence should remain in place. Trustee academy visits were important and safeguarding questions should be raised during these visits. The Single Central Register and training logs should be up-to-date. This could be digitised and monitored at Academy Committee level.

Q: Do we have external safeguarding audits?
A: Yes, the audits vary in quality by each Local Authority. Safeguarding leads complete their own audits, although they should not repeat the work of the external audits. It was all about the triangulation of the internal and external audits.

Q: Will Trustees be offered safeguarding training?
A: Yes, this will take place at the governor training session on 14 September.

Q: Please can we include an explanation of all acronyms?
A: Yes, we will ensure this in future reports.

Safeguarding Report

Trustees noted the termly safeguarding report. NS reassured Trustees that detailed discussions had been held at the Education Committee.

9 STEP Anti-Racism Curriculum

A progress update on STEP's Anti-Racism (AR) curriculum was presented by TM. The following points were raised:

Progress to Date

- The AR Curriculum Team was formed following Black Lives Matter and George Floyd in May 2020;
- Four pedagogues from different academies and backgrounds were tasked with the question 'Can a curriculum be anti-racist?';
- Following several meetings between the team members to discuss research and how to answer the question, in December 2021, the team presented its findings and intentions to STEP SLT at the Headteacher conference in Brighton;
- Subject audits, vocabulary and networking were the key vehicles to begin the scrutiny of curricula;
- Headteachers provided names of AR Champions from each of the 20 academies;
- Headteachers agreed that subject audits, agreed vocabulary and networking opportunities, proposed as part of the AR Team's action plan (with accompanying timeline), would be a suitable route to begin interrogating curricula across the Trust with an AR lens;
- An AR networking and training day was hosted at La Fontaine Academy on 30 June.

Successes

- 75% of AR Champions attended networking meeting;
- Curricula across the Trust has made significant strides towards ensuring a balanced and reflective curriculum;
- Feedback from Survey Monkey was positive and encouraging;
- Materials used on the training day have been shared on One Drive and attendees/ AR Champions intend to use these for CPD in their own academies;
- Commitment from senior leaders and AR Champions has been high;
- Best practice has been shared across multiple academies.

Challenges

- Limited time and capacity of the AR team involved – they are full time senior leaders in academies and the level of commitment required and given this year was not currently sustainable;
- Beyond this academic year, all academies would now take individual ownership – no central monitoring or quality control which could risk undoing all the hard work to date;
- Narrow focus on AR could eclipse other factors influencing discrimination;
- Equal spotlight on homophobia, anti-semitism, gender bias, ageism would be welcomed at Trust level.

Thinking about the next steps moving forward, there needs to be a standardised curriculum to enable initiatives to be monitored, measured and assessed. It should be the responsibility of a central individual and team of experts to look at Equality, Inclusion and Diversity through a standardised curriculum.

STEP Ahead – We invest in our future

10 Diversity Analysis

A report on staff retention, ethnicity and gender across the Trust was noted. JH explained that he had been asked to look at the diversity data and to have detailed conversations across the Trust. The report summarised progress in the whole area and also specifically looked at gender and retention at the most senior levels.

There had been improvements in the key areas. STEP had continued to have a high rate of staff retention and this often created issues for senior positions becoming available. It had however allowed leadership structures to be reviewed and to identify individuals who were ready for their next step. The improvements did not yet feel like they had transpired but the change was expected to come through in the longer term.

Q: Would you look at setting targets?

A: We had previously thought about setting targets but it felt that this may be counter-productive. A lot of work had been done on creating exposure to CPD opportunities and making leaders aware of how they could be supported.

Q: It was good to see the progress of the hard work, particularly in the Senior Leadership roles across the Trust in 2020/21, however the top level of the Executive Team still does not show a particularly good level of diversity.

A: We are transparent around the data and our intention is to improve this in the longer term. We would also continue our work on the talent mapping to identify and strengthen career pathways across the Trust.

Q: How would this influence the wider reach of people in future succession plans? Who was involved in talent spotting and recruitment? It was important to ensure equality in these decision making processes.

A: I agree that more work was needed to ensure fairness and equality for everyone to apply. We needed to target key groups and think about how best to support minority leaders.

UN left the meeting.

11 Communications

Trustees received a proposal on improving STEP’s external communications. BM reported that the recruitment process for a Communications and Fundraising Manager had been unsuccessful. To ensure the appropriate level of expertise to take the Trust into the next stage of growth, it was suggested that the consultancy firm PLMR be appointed for a one-year trial basis. Should the initial one year trial prove to be successful, a full tender exercise would be required. This would also allow an internal appointment to be reconsidered.

Q: Was there a limit to the number of hours of activity as part of the recommended package?

A: There would be further discussions around hours and cost for additional work. A quote would always be provided for additional work.

Trustees noted the full package of services offered as part of the 12 month gold membership and approved the cost of £43,740. SS recommended that the full social media package may not be required as STEP already had a set of guidelines on this.

STEP Up – We all succeed together

12 Financial Management and Monitoring

STEP Management Accounts

The STEP Management Accounts for Period 9 (May 2021/22) and the high level summary of STEP’s in-year financial position as at 31 May 2022 was noted.

2022/23 Budgets

The Finance and Operations Committee had looked in detail at the proposed 2022/23 budgets and recommended them for Board approval. Trustees approved the 2022/23 budgets and considered STEP to be a Going Concern.

Update from Finance and Operations Committee

AF provided an update on the Finance and Operations Committee held on 5 July 2022. The forecasted reserves target of £2m was expected to be achieved this year. Good discussions had taken place on the lowest paid staff within the Trust and the Committee were reassured to hear that pay was in line with best practice to ensure fairness to other staff who would also be impacted by rising living costs. The consolidation of pension funds had also been considered and there would be no impact to staff.

	<p>Q: Do we have plans to spend the reserves? A: Yes, this will be needed to cover inflation and rising costs. Plans were in place to deal with the rising costs but trustees should be mindful of the increases ahead.</p> <p><u>Significant Items of Expenditure</u> There were no significant items of expenditure to approve as recommended by the Finance and Operations Committee.</p> <p><u>Newly appointed auditors/tender</u> A report on the audit tender and the newly appointed auditors was noted.</p> <p><u>Equitable Funding</u> A briefing paper on the impact of equitable funding across the Trust was noted. The paper had been reviewed in detail at Committee level. There was no suggestion that the model had negatively impacted educational outcomes at this point in time, but this would continue to be monitored.</p> <p><u>Pupil Number Projections</u> A report on pupil number projections across the Trust and how this would be pro-actively managed was noted.</p> <p><i>BM left the meeting.</i></p>
<p>13</p>	<p><u>Educational Standards and Performance</u></p> <p><u>Educational Performance 2021/22</u> The Trust average for Reading, Writing and Maths combined was 65.7% (expected target was 80%). There had been a significant difference in outcomes between South London and East Sussex with the exception of Breakwater Academy. Detailed discussions on pupil outcomes had been held at the Education Committee.</p> <p><u>Education Committee</u> NS provided an update on discussions held at the Education Committee on 11 July 2022. Trust wide attendance and how to improve persistent absence had been discussed. Discussions around the proposed new STEP Standards had also taken place along with a review of the equitable funding model. Pupil outcomes had been presented and the Committee were reassured to see that outcomes across the Trust had been strong. The Committee had also discussed the outcomes of the East Sussex academies and the plans going forward to improve these.</p>
<p>14</p>	<p><u>Academy Engagement</u></p> <p>The schedule of Trustee academy visits for Autumn 2022 was noted.</p>
<p>15</p>	<p><u>La Salle Education</u></p> <p>TM provided an update on the proposed collaboration with La Salle Education, the creator and provider of 'Complete Maths', used by all STEP academies. The work would enable STEP's bespoke curriculum to sit on the La Salle platform and be available to all academies across the Trust at no cost. He reminded Trustees of their duty to ensure that the Trust was being used to further the core Mission and this opportunity would allow the curriculum to become more</p>

closely aligned through this format. The framework would also create significant CPD and resources as we moved to greater alignment of the curriculum and pedagogy. The Education Committee had reviewed the proposal in detail from an educational perspective and raised no concerns.

Trustees approved the collaboration with La Salle on the understanding that it would support the move towards a consistent curriculum offer across the Trust.

BM re-joined the meeting.

STEP Way – We agree to do things like this

16 STEP Governance

STEP Standards

CM provided an update on the review of the STEP Standards. The proposed new STEP Standards had been presented at Committee level and comments had been incorporated.

Q: It was hard to understand how we move beyond a subjective judgement to something that was more target driven.

A: The data was always triangulated alongside the Quality Assurance with Headteachers. Once the new report had been produced it would be easier to see the drivers of the impact and how this feeds into the assessment of risk.

Q: I am keen not to lose sight of the things that we cared about and that could not be measured, for example the breadth of the curriculum and cultural capital, rather than just the Ofsted Standards.

A: The STEP Standards were originally designed for discussion with leaders which would take into account the individual differences and the experiences of the children.

Audit and Risk Committee

The Trust was currently just below the compulsory limit for establishing a separate Audit and Risk Committee. The proposal to establish a new Audit and Risk Committee and the Terms of Reference were approved in principle and would be set up when required once the Committee Members' succession plans had been agreed.

Committee Success Plans

The Chair would discuss Committee succession planning and the safeguarding lead role with trustees outside of the meeting.

Governance Review Action Plan

The Governance Review Action Plan was noted. It was agreed that a joint working party of Trustees (RV, PL and SS) and the Executive Team would be held to discuss the action plan in more detail.

Academy Committees

The minutes of the Spring term Academy Committee meetings (available on TTG) were noted. The STEP Governor appointments were approved as set out in the paper.

	<p><u>Training</u> The next governance training session will be held on 14 September 2022 at 6.00pm (virtual) and will include safeguarding training. The next AC Chairs’ and Trustees’ forum will be held on 20 October 2022. Trustees were asked to provide any required individual or Board wide training to the Clerk and Chair.</p> <p>Action: Provide details of individual or Board wide training to the Clerk and Chair. (Trustees)</p>
17	<p><u>Policies</u></p> <p>Trustees reviewed and approved the following statutory policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive Group Pay Policy • Dealing with Allegations of Abuse Against Staff • Staff Code of Conduct • Shared Parental Leave Policy • Support Staff Maternity/ Paternity Leave Policy and Teachers Maternity/ Paternity Leave Policy • Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy • Online Safety and Social Media Policy <p>Trustees ratified the following policies approved by the Finance and Operations Committee on 5 July 2022:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Charging & Remissions Policy • Contributions, Pooling and Reserves Policy • Disciplinary Guidance and Procedures • Procedure for Workers with Children attending a STEP Academy • Freedom of Information Policy • Information Management Policy <p>There were no policies approved by the Education Committee on 11 July 2022.</p>
18	<p><u>Complaints</u></p> <p>The termly complaints report was noted.</p> <p>Q: The number of complaints had been notably higher this term. Do leaders need further support in this area?</p> <p>A: There had been a recent increase in complaints due to lots of factors. The handling of these complaints was regularly discussed by the Executive Team. The Stage 3 Executive Team panel review had been time consuming but helpful in finding resolutions. We would continue to check on the well-being of Heads and offer support where we could.</p>
STEP Ahead – We invest in our future	
19	<p><u>Risk Profile</u></p> <p>The Trust’s Risk Profile report for the Summer term was noted.</p>

<p>20</p>	<p><u>Signing of Legal Documentation</u></p> <p>There had been no legal documents signed by the Company Secretary, CEO, CFOO or Chair of Trustees since the previous meeting.</p>
<p>21</p>	<p><u>Correspondence to the Chair/ Chair's Actions</u></p> <p>No other correspondence had been received by the Chair since the previous meeting.</p> <p>The following actions had been taken by the Chair since the last meeting:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approval to proceed with an externally funded community pitch at Turnham Academy (6 May 2022) • Confidential settlement agreement in relation to Telscombe Cliffs Academy (10 June 2022) • Approval of payment to external advisor on CEO appraisal panel for 2022/23 (13 July 2022) • Approval of Trustee travel expense in relation to Wood Green Academy visit (13 July 2022)
<p>22</p>	<p><u>Meeting Impact</u></p> <p>Trustees thanked the Executive Team for their updates. Trustees were reassured by the positive outcomes of the pupils this year and the steps in place to support some of the East Sussex academies. They had also found the discussions on safeguarding useful and were confident that the Trust's safeguarding strategy was exceptionally strong and that all safeguarding practices were in place to protect the safety and wellbeing of the STEP children. The discussions around strategic growth had also been useful and would have a positive impact on the Trust and children in the longer term.</p> <p>Trustees felt that there was an appropriate level of support and challenge for the Executive Team. There had been a good level of debate but it would be helpful if the debate could be more directly related to the decision set out in the papers. Some Trustees felt that the debate was sometimes constrained by the length of the agenda and it would be useful to consider the structure of the agenda in order to prioritise debates.</p>
<p>23</p>	<p><u>Other Business</u></p> <p>The Chair thanked MD on behalf of Trustees for all his hard work and the significant contribution he had made to the Trust. He truly applauded MD's commitment to creating a safe, diverse and successful Trust. He had strengthened the leadership of education across the Trust and played an instrumental role in improving the educational outcomes of the STEP children. Trustees wished MD all the best in his retirement.</p> <p>MD explained that he was very proud of the part that he had played in creating STEP and it was a privilege to have worked for the Trust and to have had the opportunity to create the unique culture and 'One Team'. There had been a huge number of challenges along the way and he was confident that PG and the Executive Team would go on to succeed. He thanked Trustees for their on-going support which he had greatly valued. He felt very lucky to have worked with such</p>

	extremely talented leaders and supportive trustees. He was proud of what the organisation had become and wished everyone well.
24	<u>Date of Next Meeting</u> The Board Development Session would be held on 26 September 2022 at 2.00pm at Tudor Academy. The next Board of Trustees meeting would be held on 12 October at 5.15pm (virtual). The 2022/23 Board and Committee meeting dates were noted.
25	<u>Confidential Matters</u> Confidential discussions on staffing, strategic growth and specific academies were recorded in the confidential set of minutes.

Action List	
Action	Owner
Provide details of individual or Board wide training to the Clerk and Chair.	Trustees

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