

**St Helens College**

**GOVERNING BOARD**

**Minutes from the meeting held at the Stockbridge Lane Campus, Knowsley  
21 March 2024 at 3.15pm**

|                       |                     |                                                   |
|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Present:</b>       | Phil Han            | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Alison Cannon       | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Alun Owen           | External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)           |
|                       | Jim Pinsent         | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Liz Duncan          | External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)           |
|                       | John Heritage       | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Andrew Lang         | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Paul Growney        | External Governor                                 |
|                       | Simon Pierce        | Chief Executive/Principal                         |
|                       | Tracey Turner       | Staff Governor                                    |
| <b>In attendance:</b> | Stephanie Donaldson | Deputy Chief Executive                            |
|                       | Mohammed Ramzan     | Vice Principal – Quality and Student Experience   |
|                       | Philip Grant        | Vice Principal - Curriculum                       |
|                       | Janet Hulme         | Director of People and Organisational Development |
|                       | Carys Bibby         | Governance Director (minutes)                     |

Governing Board members were taken on a tour of the Supported Learning provision by Head of School, Nicola Wareing.

**Andrew Lang and Tracey Turner joined the meeting.**

**230    Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received for Zulakha Desai, Natalie Ibbs, Michael Ridgeway and Jen McGill.

**231    Declarations of interest**

Alison Cannon for minute 234

**232    Minutes of the previous meetings held on 1 February 2024 and 29 February 2024**

Minutes of the previous meetings were approved as an accurate record.

**233     Matters arising and action tracker**

**RESOLVED:**     The Governing Board noted the action tracker updates.

**Alison Cannon, Stephanie Donaldson, Mohammed Ramzan and Philip Grant left the meeting.**

**234     Vice Chair appointment**

One application was received for the role of Vice Chair.

**RESOLVED:**     The Governing Board approved the appointment of Alison Cannon as Vice Chair.

**Alison Cannon, Stephanie Donaldson, Mohammed Ramzan and Philip Grant rejoined the meeting.**

**235     Curriculum and quality update**

The report presented a summary of the quality of teaching, learning and assessment activity across the College and the work undertaken to accelerate the journey of improvement, alongside the College's Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) update for the first term.

The Continuous Professional Development (CPD) day which will take place on 28 March 2024, will continue to focus on those areas for improvement highlighted in the last full Ofsted inspection. There will also be sessions on new areas for development, including Artificial Intelligence (AI) as a tool for teaching. It is expected that AI can be used to improve workload for teachers, which is one of the Ofsted themes for improvement. The Governing Board queried if staff are engaged with the CPD offer. Feedback from staff has been positive, with three times the number of responses received for CPD day feedback in January as in the previous year.

In response to a query on whether the grading profile of 76% effective observations was in line with expectations, the Governing Board was informed that, following re-training of the observation team, it was expected that the number of effective observations would decrease to reflect a realistic picture of teaching quality. Joint observations with an external quality assurer provided evidence that observations are now consistent and accurate. The areas where most ineffective sessions have been observed are areas with other concerns such as staffing, for example Health and Social Care, and Business. Sessions in Early Years and Creative Media have been observed to be effective, which is in line with expectations.

The Governing Board queried whether the support provided to staff who have had an ineffective observation is having the desired impact. The Quality Team is now fully staffed following the backfill on internal appointments. This has allowed for the strengthening of performance management processes, which can be evidenced through the three re-observations which have taken place this week, where sessions were previously judged to be ineffective and are now effective. Staff are either engaging with the development and action plan in the 20 days before a reobservation or choosing to leave the institution. There is also a rolling CPD offer for staff to access.

There was a discussion around retention, which has improved from the same point in 2023. Ensuring attendance is good will help with retention. Attendance declined before

Christmas, however, since January 2024, weekly management meetings have taken place to monitor and improve attendance, and the decline has since stopped. Various strategies have been trialled by different curriculum areas and effective strategies are being shared.

Attendance Officers are now in post and will work on engaging hard-to-reach parents. The Governing Board queried what strategies an Attendance Officer might use for engagement. This varies in each case and will be based on the barriers to participation for each student. Attendance Officers will be able to visit parents and students at home to gain more insight into individual circumstances.

Students who have good relationships with teachers are more likely to attend. Areas with staffing issues this year have seen poor attendance. Curriculum areas such as Business are hard to recruit to across the sector. Despite recent pay rises the College is still offering lower salaries than some other local colleges which impacts staff recruitment.

The Governing Board challenged whether all 'amber' actions in the Quality Improvement Plan will be achieved before the end of the year. Sufficient actions are in place to address the issues, however many of the impact measures will not be available until later in the year, at which point it is expected that these actions will become 'green'.

**RESOLVED:**      **The Governing Board noted the report and the key actions being taken to accelerate improvement in teaching, learning and assessment as well as developing the leadership and management team.**

**The Governing Board noted the progress against the Quality Improvement Plan.**

## **236      Performance and compliance**

The report provided a summary of progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the agreed approach to assurance reporting. The compliance report was also provided.

The Governing Board discussed the announcement of the closure of St Helens Chamber. The College was asked to enrol 35 young people who were students at the Chamber, but declined as they are out of funding and would negatively impact College achievement rates. The College will be able to accommodate any apprentices from the Chamber as they are mainly trained in the workplace and options around employing former Chamber assessors to staff the provision will be considered. Information is being shared publicly around the support the College can provide for employers, staff, students and apprentices.

Since the report was written, the College has received its 2024/25 allocation for the devolved Adult Education Budget (AEB) which will increase by 6% from 2023/24. This will allow the College to deliver a similar level of adult provision with the new funding rates per student and is the first increase since 2010. This, in combination with additional 16-18 funding for English and maths, will strengthen the College's financial position in 2024/25. The Governing Board noted potential challenges with staffing additional maths classes from 2025/26 which will need to be monitored.

The report presented a proposal for a less operational update format for the progress against the strategic plan. A discussion was held on what the new report should include. The Governing Board agreed that a strategic report, celebrating success and raising issues with progress would have more value. It was agreed that the report should provide an update on each strategic goal at every Governing Board meeting.

**RESOLVED:** The Governing Board noted progress against the high-level KPIs and targets for 2023/24.

The Governing Board noted the compliance report.

The Governing Board approved the proposed approach to reporting of progress against the College's Strategic Goals.

**237 Financial management report**

The report provided a summary of financial matters for information and included the management accounts for the six months ended 31 January 2024. These accounts included a full forecast for the year. It is expected that the College will achieve a 'good' financial health score.

The Governing Board discussed financial reporting as the current management accounts format is incredibly detailed. A proposal was raised to present a condensed version of the accounts with a 'deep dive' at each Governing Board meeting to aid governor understanding. The Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee scrutinise the accounts in detail, however all Governing Board members must be cognisant of the financial position and have a responsibility for college solvency. The new report must find the correct balance between summary and detail to provide assurance. Governors should also continue to receive management accounts monthly as per the external governance review recommendation. The Governing Board requested that a proposed financial management report format is brought to the meeting on 16 May 2025.

**RESOLVED:** The Governing Board noted the management accounts and update.

John Heritage left the meeting.

**238 Estates update**

The report provided a summary of estates matters for information. An Estates Working Group meeting took place on 18 March 2024

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

The Governing Board was informed that a preliminary design has been created for a partial decant of the SKB Building at the Town Centre site however this has not yet been

costed. A full decant will still be considered in order for the College to vacate the environmentally uneconomic SKB Building.

**RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the estates update.**

**239 Policies**

The report presented the Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Pay and Leave, Carers Leave, Flexible Working Requests and Parental Bereavement Leave policies for consideration. The report also presented the Emergency Plan, Financial Regulations and University College St Helens Higher Education Tuition Fees for consideration, which are being recommended by a committee. The report presents the recommendation of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee to delay the review of the Health and Safety Policy.

The Governing Board supported the proposed levels of pay for carers, parental bereavement and paternity leave, which are above statutory pay amounts. All policies are in line with recent employment law changes.

The Audit Committee has considered the Emergency Plan and requested a test run of this is completed with managers.

**RESOLVED: The Governing Board approved the Maternity, Paternity, Adoption and Shared Parental Pay and Leave, Carers Leave, Flexible Working Requests and Parental Bereavement Leave and delegated future reviews of all family friendly policies to the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.**

**The Governing Board accepted the recommendation of the Audit Committee to approve the Emergency Plan and the Financial Regulations.**

**The Governing Board accepted the recommendation of the Curriculum and Quality Committee to approve the Higher Education Tuition Fees Policy.**

**The Governing Board accepted the recommendation of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee to approve the continued use of the Health and Safety Policy until 16 May 2024.**

**240 Annual gender pay gap report**

The report presented information about the gender pay gap at St Helens College. This information must be published by 31 March 2024. The College's median pay gap is below the UK national average. Both the median and mean pay gaps have reduced since the last report.

The Governing Board queried the reason for the pay gap. The College pays the same salary for the same role but has a larger amount of females in lower paid business support roles. The gap has narrowed as the College has committed to paying the real living wage.

**RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Gender Pay Gap Report 2024.**

**241     Corporate risk register**

The report provided an update regarding change in the corporate risk register. The Governing Board requested that the residual risk score of risk 21 be increased, in light of the non-compliance with health and safety items highlighted in the compliance report.

**RESOLVED:     The Governing Board noted the corporate risk register.**

**242     Board appointments**

**The Governing Board approved the recommendations of the Search and Governance Committee to appoint Natalie Ibbs to the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee and Phil Han to the Search and Governance Committee.**

**243     Verbal reports of link governors**

Alison Cannon gave an update on recent meeting with the Careers and Safeguarding Teams. As the Designated Safeguarding Lead will be retiring at the end of the academic year, the teams are getting used to their new management and the new Director of Supported Learning is undertaking all relevant safeguarding training to take up the Designated Safeguarding Lead role.

Andrew Lang reiterated the progress made towards compliance with health and safety processes and the ongoing requirement to support the Health and Safety Manager.

Alun Owen will attend Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy Group meetings from next term.

**RESOLVED:     The Governing Board noted the updates.**

**244     Committee chairs update**

The Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee continue to monitor staff wellbeing and sickness. Both short- and long-term sickness have improved since the implementation of the People Strategy. A new financial strategy is being developed and will be presented to the Governing Board for approval before the end of the academic year, to allow time for this to be fully considered and linked to the overall college strategy.

The Chair of the Audit Committee reported that the College's new internal auditors have been in post for nine months and have reported a good relationship with colleagues.

The Performance and Remuneration Committee continue to scrutinise performance management. The percentage of staff appraisals completed has increased to 81% since the performance report was written, indicating the impact of intervention actions.

**RESOLVED:     The Governing Board noted the updates.**

**245     Any other business**

Alison Cannon noted her intention to step down from the Audit Committee following her appointment as Vice Chair of the Board. Membership will be considered by the Search and Governance Committee.

The Governing Board was pleased to have held the meeting at Stockbridge Lane.

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on 16 May 2024 at 3.15pm.