

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens Thursday 19 May 2022 at 4.00pm

Present:	Bill Nixon (Chair)	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	David Balsamo	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Zulakha Desai	External Governor
	Julie Heap	Staff Governor
	Phil Han	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Nick Shore	External Governor
Alicja Gwiazda-Treska	Student Governor	
In attendance:	Rav Garcha	Chief Financial Officer
	Mark Doyle	Deputy Principal - Curriculum and Quality
	Gillian Hayhurst	Governance Director (minutes)
	Ron Hill	Stone King LLP (observer)

The meeting opened at 4.00pm.

The Chair welcomed Ron Hill to the meeting, who is leading on the external governance review.

28 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Debbie Calderbank, John Heritage, Alun Owen, Benjamin Bennett-Stanley and Liz Duncan.

The Governing Board was informed that Sophie Littlewood had resigned from her role as governor with immediate effect.

29 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

30 Minutes of the previous meetings

Typographical amendments had been shared with the Governing Board in advance of the meeting. Jim Pinsent was included on the list of those present for 17 March 2022 meeting.

The minutes of the meetings held on 17 March 2022, including the private and confidential addendum to minute 22 were approved as an accurate record.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 May 2022 were approved as an accurate record subject to the insertion of “by the approved authority” at minute 25.

31 **Matters arising and action tracker**

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted updates to the action tracker including those that have been completed.**

32 **Chair’s update**

The Chair provided an update on their engagement with College activity since the last update.

Following the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) day in April 2022, the Chair shared some anecdotal feedback from staff that welcomed further engagement with Governors. Details of future CPD events will be shared and Governors encouraged to attend.

A meeting has been held with representatives from the Further Education Commissioner’s office (FEC) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) to agree the Post-Intervention Monitoring and Support (PIMS) action plan. The agreed plan acknowledges the improvements made by the College and the positive relationship that has developed between all parties.

The College has been asked to provide feedback on the external governance review conducted in 2021 by the Education and Training Foundation in partnership with the Association of Colleges. A meeting with [REDACTED] the National Leaders of Governance, is being held on 23 May 2022 that includes the Chair, Deputy Chair, Principal and Governance Director.

Alicja Gwiazda-Treska joined the meeting.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the Chair’s update.**

33 **Chief Executive Officer update**

The Chief Executive Officer/Principal provided an update on intervention, curriculum and quality, the current financial position, estates, current areas of focus, the Queen’s speech, qualification reform, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision Green Paper and emerging opportunities.

Regarding the PIMS action plan, the Governing Board was advised that the first iteration had required a ‘Good’ financial health score. This was amended to ‘Requires Improvement’ in the final version as the ESFA and FEC appreciated that the sensitivity of the point scoring system may be immaterial in actual accounting terms.

The Chief Executive Officer/Principal and Chief Financial Officer have begun some business intelligence analysis of the College against other providers in the region.

Benchmarking data will be presented to a future Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee meeting.

A discussion was held on the budget for 2022/23. The University and College Union (UCU) has requested a 10% national pay rise following an increase in funding rates. The Governing Board considered its strategic position regarding the budget and are expecting the College to continue to show financial improvement. The Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee will consider the budget and appropriate improvement measures in more detail at its meeting in June 2022.

The Governing Board was updated on the Skills Development Fund bid, which had been submitted the previous week. The College has bid for capital and revenue funding to introduce and/or improve provision in external wall insulation, fenestration and renewable energy heating systems. If successful, the funds will also allow for the purchase of a fully electric car for use in motor vehicle studies.

In response to a query on applications for 2022/23, the Governing Board was informed that applications have increased since the previous year, however it is difficult to extrapolate conversion rates from previous years' data. Work is ongoing to improve progression rates and the new provision in Knowsley is proving popular in all areas except for performing arts and music. A week of activity is planned in July 2022 to further engage local schools and potential applicants.

The Governing Board considered the impact of the Queen's Speech. Potential risks include increased competition with the possible addition of a 16-19 free school in Knowsley and additional pressures on local authority colleagues as they manage the requirements of changing legislation including the Schools Bill. The Chair of the Higher Education Committee provided feedback on discussions held at the committee on the impacts of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Bill.

The Skills and Post-16 Education Bill places a duty on Governors to review curriculum provision to ensure it meets local need and this is being included within the schedule of business for 2022/23. The St Helens Chamber of Commerce (the Chamber) is working with local employers on the Local Skills Improvement Plans. The Principal has raised concerns with the Association of Colleges as the Chamber is both a competitor and a local representative body for employers.

The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision Green Paper proposes a number of improvements that the Governing Board will need to consider as part of the wider curriculum review. There will be a requirement to have a SEND link governor. The Green Paper does not currently address the needs for secondary pupils with additional support in schools who do not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHP).

Ofsted has completed its pilot inspection programme prior to introducing the new framework in September 2022. The College is preparing for changes to the Ofsted inspection framework from September and how it contributes to meeting skills need. This will include providing support to governors who may be part of the inspection.

A discussion was held on qualification reform and the impact it will have on funding for level 3 qualifications. The College will review its competitors' offer for the final year of funding in 2023/24, prior to the shift in focus solely to T levels.

The Principal updated the Governing Board on emerging opportunities (and their associated risks). Local authorities are considering how funding for 'Multiply', the national adult numeracy initiative, may be used. The College is developing links with leaders in hydrogen energy production, [REDACTED]

The Governing Board thanked the Senior Leadership Team and all staff involved with the lifting of the Financial Notice to Improve. Governors and senior leaders reflected on how this positive news and the additional opportunities it can bring to the College will be shared more widely with staff and celebrated.

The College has successfully re-registered to deliver apprenticeship training and the collaborative working required for the submission was acknowledged.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Chief Executive Officer update.

The Governing Board noted that the College's Financial Notice to Improve has been lifted by the Department for Education.

The Governing Board noted the Post-Intervention Monitoring and Support plan agreed with the Department for Education.

34 Operational plan 2022/23

The report presented a high-level overview of progress against the College's Operational Plan 2022/23.

Phil Han left the meeting for a short period.

Senior leaders are further reviewing the operational plan with managers to ensure that timescales for completion are realistic. Activity has slowed in human resources and quality due to capacity issues but these are being addressed.

The Governing Board noted that senior leaders are looking at creative ways to fund the College's strategy but that some costs will need to be factored into budget considerations for 2022/23. It was acknowledged that recent rising costs may impact on deliverables compared to original assumptions.

Regarding reporting, the Governing Board welcomed the high-level overview and would like future iterations to continue to focus on changes to timescales, positive action and outcomes and lessons learned

Governors were asked to join a task and finish group to draft a reporting and accountability framework. Bill Nixon, David Balsamo and Alison Cannon volunteered to join the group. The Governance Director will extend the invitation to the governors who sent apologies for this meeting and arrange a task and finish group meeting in June 2022.

In response to a query on the impact on human resources, the Governing Board noted there is a sector-wide issue with staff recruitment and retention. Senior leaders will consider strategies to mitigate the risk and consider which parts of the strategy should be prioritised. It was agreed that people and growth are key priorities and investment in these areas will support delivery of the other actions.

Alison Cannon left the meeting for a short period.

The Governing Board asked what steps have been taken to develop strategic relationships with partners. The initial action was to consider new and existing transactional partnerships that could be developed resulting in the College being the preferred training provider and co-investment in the estate and curriculum resources.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted current progress against the College's Operational action plan.

The Governing Board identified governors to lead a task and finish group to support the development of the reporting and accountability framework, including any arrangements for governor dashboards.

35 QIP and College v EIF Good – May 2022

The Governing Board was provided with an update to the QIP since the previous meeting in March 2022.

Attendance improvement activity has been targeted at areas of significant risk and managers are testing the appropriate use of Attendance Officers for maximum results.

Work experience staff have been moved into a centralised team and a supervisor role is being created to coordinate activity. There remains some reticence from employers to provide work experience because of the pandemic but there has been an increased commitment for future placements. Students will still meet the minimum study programme hours but there is a low risk of clawback from the Capacity Development Fund. Employers have been involved in student activity in other ways, such as attending classes as guest speakers.

Student feedback from the mid-year survey is positive and there have been improvements in teaching and learning across the College. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] A discussion was held on the College's preparedness for an Ofsted visit and the challenges associated with providing a representative view of the learning environment should the inspection take place during the summer examination period.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the updates to the Quality Improvement Plan.**

The Governing Board noted the updates to the College versus Education Inspection Framework 'Good'.

36 Management accounts for the period ending 31 March 2022

The report presented the St Helens College Group management accounts for the six months ending 31 March 2022 for information.

The Governing Board considered the high-level summary and actions being taken to control costs, particularly relating to the variable electricity contract. Contingency funds have been used for sub-contractors to ensure the College meets its adult learning targets.

The Governing Board noted that £765,000 of capital expenditure had been brought forward from the 2020/21 budget and that approximately £350,000 will be accrued this year for works due for payment in August and September 2022.

David Balsamo left the meeting for a short period.

Consideration was given to the cash flow forecast and its negative position in February 2023 should no mitigating actions be taken. The Governing Board will get a further opportunity to discuss the risks associated with the T6 project at its meeting in July 2022, prior to committing to any further spend. The Governing Board reiterated the need to have a clear action plan in place should any of the risks crystallise. The original timetable for delivery of the T6 project may be delayed due to challenges with resourcing the steel required for construction. The College will need to ensure that it does not over-commit and ensure that its contingency plans establish areas to deliver the T level curriculum within the existing estate.

[REDACTED]

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the management accounts for the six months ending 31 March 2022.**

37 **Higher Education policy approvals**

The report presented the Student Protection Plan and Student Transfer Policy for consideration and informed the Governing Board that the Higher Education Committee have reviewed the Code of Practice for the Freedom of Speech.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board approved the Student Protection Plan.**

The Governing Board approved the Student Transfer Policy.

The Governing Board noted that the Code of Practice for the Freedom of Speech has been reviewed by the Higher Education Committee and that no amendments were required.

38 **Verbal updates from committee chairs and matters for escalation from committees**

The clerk provided an update on behalf of the Curriculum and Quality Committee Chair. An informative presentation was received from [REDACTED] interim head of school for business and professional. The committee discussed action being taken to improve outcomes, particularly for the 25 at risk students identified. The committee also considered changes to the curriculum offer and the introduction of Saturday and summer sessions. The committee challenged the reasons for poor predicted outcomes for students who have been retained for the academic year. Qualitative data suggests the issues relate to poor attendance, outstanding or late work submissions and a dependency on final examination results. For the 2020/21 academic year, 80.1% of students have moved onto course-related destinations. Changes to the curriculum for 2022/23 were shared. This included activity across a number of campuses and curriculum levels, including a planned approach to introducing T level studies in 2023/24. The committee is keen to strengthen the mix of skills and experience among its members, particularly through engagement with students and employers. As part of its annual governance review, the committee will consider how it can further engage with strategic planning.

The Chair of Higher Education Committee provided an update on the meeting held in May 2022. In addition to the policies presented earlier in the meeting, the committee had discussed a fall in applications for the health and fitness course. This was a recruitment outlier and teams are working on understanding the reason for this. Exit interviews are being held with students who drop out of studies or decline to progress. As part of the committee's self-assessment review, an interesting discussion was held on balancing strategic oversight and performance management. Committee members wish to further challenge themselves on strategic leadership and horizon scanning has been included on the next agenda. The Director of Adult and Higher Education has been tasked with updating the strategy with ambitions for further growth.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the committee minutes and verbal updates from the chairs.**

39 **Verbal report of safeguarding and health and safety governors**

The Safeguarding lead governor informed the Governing Board that the next Safeguarding Committee meeting will be held on 17 June 2022. The governor has engaged regularly with the team, particularly following the recent staffing changes. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] The team is considered robust and resilient but colleagues were asked to continue to support individuals. Two additional posts have been approved. [REDACTED]

The Health and Safety Committee is meeting week beginning 23 May 2022. There were no concerns to bring to the Governing Board's attention.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the verbal updates from the Safeguarding and Health and Safety lead governors.**

40 **Board calendar 2022/23**

The Governing Board considered the proposal to shift the focus of some Governing Board meetings to ensure adequate provision is made for strategic discussion and planning. Concerns were raised that this may increase the risk of the Governing Board not executing their fiduciary duties. It was explained that the proposal is not intended to reduce the time governors have for monitoring performance of the executive across all aspects of college activity (e.g. finance, curriculum, student development and welfare, etc) and that mechanisms will be strengthened for committees to escalate matters to the Governing Board in alternative ways than reliance on reporting at meetings. A draft schedule of business will be presented at the meeting in July 2022 for the Governing board to consider.

Governors requested that the Search and Governance Committee and Performance and Remuneration Committee meetings take place on the same day. Calendar appointments will be issued over the coming weeks.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the Governing Board calendar for 2022/23.**

41 **Any other business**

A questionnaire has been issued to governors as part of the external review. Governors were encouraged to contribute. The deadline for responses is 6 June 2022.

Date and time of the next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on Thursday 7 July 2022 at 4.00pm in the Governing Boardroom at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens.

The meeting closed at 6.22pm.