St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes from the meeting held at the St Helens Town Centre Campus
Thursday 12 December 2024 at 3.00pm

Present:	Phil Han	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Liz Duncan	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Alun Owen	External Governor
	John Heritage	External Governor
	Paul Growney	External Governor
	Natalie Ibbs	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
	Fego Orughele	Student Governor
	Travis Brown	Student Governor
In attendance:	Stephanie Donaldson	Deputy Chief Executive
	Mohammed Ramzan	Vice Principal – Quality and Student Experience
	Philip Grant	Vice Principal - Curriculum
	Julia Callaghan	Managing Director, Waterside Training
	Nick Shore	Chair, Waterside Training
	Karen Musgrave	RSM
	Carys Bibby	Governance Director (minutes)

Governing Board members were taken on a tour of the Hair and Beauty curriculum area by Jen McGill, Head of School for Services to People.

The Governing Board discussed the enthusiasm shown by staff and students. Governors noted the attention to the personal development of students and how power skills are embedded in the curriculum to ensure that students can apply English and maths when dealing with customers. Governors commended strategies to improve attendance, with attendance awards displayed in the curriculum area and 55 students with more than 95% attendance. Hair and Beauty attendance is an area for improvement as this was one of the areas with lower attendance in 2023/24 and governors were pleased to see the actions being taken and the progress made.

During the visit Governors had discussed with staff that students had paper-based portfolios, rather than digital, at level 1 in order for them to develop their basic skills. The portfolio also gives students a body of work to be proud of and share with their parents and families.

Liz Duncan, Alison Cannon, John Heritage, Andrew Lang and Tracey Turner joined the meeting.

301 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received for Zulakha Desai. Welcome was extended to Fego Orughele and Travis Brown attending their first meeting as student governors.

302 Declarations of interest

It was noted that Stephanie Donaldson is an independent member of Torus' Audit Committee.

Simon Pierce, Stephanie Donaldson and Carys Bibby declared an interest in minute 315. The board resolved that staff and student governors also be asked to leave the room for this item.

Travis Brown was not eligible to vote in minute 309 due to his age and would not take part in this discussion.

303 Minutes of the previous meetings held on 10 October 2024

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

304 Matters arising and action tracker

RESOLVED: The board noted the action tracker updates.

305 Financial statements and annual report

The report presented for approval the College financial statements, regularity questionnaire, RSM letter of representation and regulatory letter of representation for the year ended 31 July 2024. The external audit report, produced by RSM, and the Audit Committee Annual Report were also provided. The Chair of the Audit Committee provided an update on the scrutiny the accounts received at the joint meeting of the Audit and Finance, Resources and Commercial Committees.

RSM confirmed that the audit is now complete. No causes for concern were raised and all points have been addressed by management. The audit was the smoothest in the five years that RSM has worked with the College, thanks to a process well managed by both the auditors and the College team.

Alun Owen left the meeting briefly.

RESOLVED: The board approved the signing of the annual report and financial statements, as recommended by the joint Audit and Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.

The board noted the external audit report for the year ending 31 July 2024.

The board approved the signing of the Letter of Representation and Regularity Letter of Representation, by the joint Audit and Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.

The board approved the Regularity Questionnaire for signature, as recommended by the Audit Committee.

The board accepted the annual report of the Audit Committee.

306 <u>College Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan</u>

The draft Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan were presented for approval, following consideration at the Self-Assessment Report Workshop meeting and recommendation by the Curriculum and Quality Committee. The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee thanked all governors who attended the Self-Assessment Report Workshop and governors agreed that this had been a useful meeting.

Achievement data for 2023/24 has now been finalised at 80.4%, a 5.6% improvement on 2022/23 with a significant improvement of 7.1% for young people. Governors discussed that rapid progress has been made overall, the number of high grades has increased, and destinations data is positive as is data for disadvantaged students. However, some achievement rates remain below the national average and retention and attendance for adults was below expectations. Improvements have already been made with respect to adult attendance and retention this academic year. Whilst the number of adults is higher than the number of young people, proportionally the College provides more education and training to young people due to the length of young people's programmes. These factors were carefully considered by governors in the workshop and used to inform the overall judgements.

Governors considered the evidence seen today in the Hair and Beauty curriculum area walk through and the reports provided to the Curriculum and Quality Committee around the progress made so far this year, which indicated improvements in leadership and management and the impact of the training and development of middle managers and teaching staff. Student and staff feedback has been positive and acknowledges the distance travelled in the last 12 months. The Governing Board discussed changes to the education inspection framework, which may impact the College's next inspection.

The Governing Board queried what further training is required for middle leaders to better model the college values. With a number of new members of the senior and wider leadership team, there is an opportunity to reset behaviours based on the college values. Training will focus on building managers' confidence and leadership skills, ensuring they understand their responsibilities in the quality improvement plan and empowering them to deliver these. Feedback from staff is that middle managers do a good job and are well respected by their teams.

The Governing Board challenged whether any of the areas that have been self-assessed as 'good' might have been assessed as 'outstanding'. Apprenticeships and high needs are both areas in which the College is working towards outstanding. The College achieves well in apprenticeships, whilst delivering difficult standards with a 3-to-4-year duration, and continuing to grow provision. Attendance and retention remain the main challenges and the reason that these areas have not been judged to be outstanding.

There is also some inconsistency in different curriculum areas, which managers are addressing to ensure delivery is of the same high standard across the College.

The Governing Board queried whether average data for attendance and retention is available for areas with a comparable demographic to that of the College. The College is working with other colleges with similar student demographics to compare attendance figures and share improvement strategies. As the starting points of students at the College tend to be lower, the progress made is greater to reach the national average. Financial hardship is the main disadvantage for students and the College's work to address this has resulted in 10% better retention and 6% better achievement for those students receiving discretionary learner support over the last two years. Governors discussed that Knowsley schools have the worst persistent non-attendance in the country according to a recent BBC report, indicating the level of challenge faced by the College, and welcomed the College remaining ambitious for these students regardless of prior performance.

RESOLVED: **The board approved the Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan, as recommended by the Curriculum and Quality Committee.**

307 **Performance/exception report**

This report provided governors with a summary of progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) as part of the agreed approach to assurance reporting, together with the board compliance report.

The Governing Board queried the impact that the 'condition of funding' announcement will have on the College in 2025/26. It had been expected that the College would need to provide an additional hour of face-to-face maths teaching for each student re retaking this subject, necessitating the recruitment of additional maths teachers, which would have presented a challenge. The College delivers 3 hours of maths currently and intends to continue this amount of delivery, supported by on-line resources. Governors were also notified that the 5% tolerance for students who do not attend English and/or maths and therefore do not meet the condition of funding will be reduced to a 2.5% tolerance, rather than the previously announced 0%.

It was noted that destinations data had improved since this report was published. However, current figures suggest that there might be fewer positive destinations at this point compared to 2023. Should the final data support this position further investigation will be undertaken into why positive destinations have decreased when achievement in 2023/24 has improved.

In the most recent student survey, 93% of students indicated that they would recommend the College to a friend. The survey results indicated a strong start to the year and good student support. The College's results compared well to other colleges and participation had improved to 70%.

The Governing Board noted that core aim attendance is in line with the College target. Governors queried the issues with English and maths attendance. Overall, 280 additional students are sitting English and maths compared to previous years and leaders worked quickly to establish and staff additional groups. The target is for English and maths to be within 10% of main course attendance and above 80%; an improving trend is now evident. English and maths attendance is reported at similar levels within the group of colleges with which the college is collaborating.

In response to a query on the level of non-compliance with mandatory training and performance management, it was reported that compliance is above 90% for both. Managers will send letters to individual staff who are not compliant this week. A similar approach in 2023/24 improved compliance with the appraisal process. The Governing Board queried whether a formal escalations process is in place for non-compliance. This will be considered to ensure that this is handled at the right level and does not immediately lead to full disciplinary action. Managers are also considering potential barriers to staff completing mandatory training and time was allocated at recent CPD days for this.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the early progress against high-level KPIs and targets for 2024/25.**

The board noted the compliance report.

308 **Financial management and estates update**

The report presented a summary of the St Helens College Group management accounts for the period ended 31 October 2024 and an update on the college estate, for information.

[redacted]

Liz Duncan left the meeting.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the report.**

309 **Pay Proposal 2024/25**

The report set out the context, potential options, and a recommendation for a cost of living pay award in 2024/25.

[redacted]

[redacted]

[redacted]

A discussion took place on pay awards made by other colleges and the varying reasons these have been achieved, including extraordinary growth in student numbers leading to in-year growth funding. Other colleges with low EBITDA are able to set deficit budgets due to higher cash balances and lower borrowing, without triggering intervention.

[redacted]

The Governing Board thanked the Principal for a very thorough paper, which had helped to guide their decision.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the current context for making a cost of living pay award and the potential financial impact of the various options considered, compared to the original college budget for 2024/25 and projections for 2025/26.**

The board approved a recommendation of the higher of a 2.5% or £750 annual increase for the 2024/25 staff pay award package, prior to discussion with trade unions.

The board approved an increase in the minimum starting salary to £30k and to add one incremental point to the teachers' pay scale from August 2025, subject to the specified criteria being met.

The board approved the recommendation of the Performance and Remuneration Committee that the pay award package for Senior Post Holders mirrors that of all staff.

Julia Callaghan and Nick Shore joined the meeting.

310 **Annual Waterside Training report**

This report summarised the financial and apprenticeship outcomes performance of Waterside Training Ltd for the academic year 2023/24. The Chair provided an overview of Waterside for newer governors; previously a joint enterprise between the College and Pilkington and now a majority owned subsidiary with all profits provided to the College via gift aid. Waterside delivers apprenticeships and bespoke training to employers and also employs the College's cleaning staff.

In response to a query on Waterside's employer reach, the Governing Board was informed that apprenticeships are predominantly based in the northwest but that technical training for employers happens UK wide through self-employed associate delivery. Waterside does not offer training outside of the UK.

The Governing Board queried how employers find Waterside. Many enquiries are received due to word-of-mouth recommendations. In the northwest region, Waterside has a strong reputation for apprenticeship delivery and company training managers are likely to use Waterside repeatedly. Waterside's programmes include full time training in the first year, delivered by assessors who are very familiar with specific employer expectations and ensure that apprentices are ready to enter these workplaces. Waterside also attracts a high number of candidates each year with over 600 applications for 65 places, which allows for strong candidates to be selected, improving retention and achievement.

The Governing Board discussed the importance of specialist staffing to deliver technical training for employers. Waterside are not constrained by the same salary structures as the College so are able to be more flexible with staffing and delivery. Governors considered how they might utilise this agility to deliver more of the college curriculum.

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

Julia Callaghan and Nick Shore left the meeting. Steve Chesworth joined the meeting.

311 **Annual health and safety report**

The report presented the Governing Board with an annual review of health and safety matters across the College, which had been discussed at the Finance, Resource & Commercial Committee on 3 October 2024.

Almost 90% of risk assessments have now been updated with only one department's risk assessments still incomplete. Updating of risk assessments has been risk based, with assessments in higher risk areas completed first. The Health and Safety Manager is working with the new Head of IT to develop a process for storage and yearly update of these assessments.

Site visits have not raised any new concerns. The Health and Safety Manager reported good support from college staff, who have invited him to do further work with students. A health and safety awareness blog for students is planned to start from January.

The Governing Board thanked the Health and Safety Manager for a clear and concise report.

RESOLVED: The board noted the health and safety report.

Steve Chesworth left the meeting.

312 Higher Education Strategy

The Higher Education Strategy was presented to the Governing Board for approval as recommended by the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

The process to create the strategy had including competitor analysis and a review of industry partners. The strategy aims include developing an ambitious curriculum focused on growth and strengthened employer links and aligning further and higher education provision to create a seamless transition for students. The strategy also recommends the reduction in the number of higher education partner institutions to one partner, following a due diligence process to select a partner who can offer the preferred delivery methods, including higher apprenticeships. [redacted]

The Governing Board queried what an associate relationship would entail. Whilst there would be an initial cost to this partnership, the College would benefit from reduced fees for development of courses, access to higher education experts who could help to develop curriculum, and the opportunity to use the associate institute's branding. The Governing Board noted these advantaged but challenged what potential disadvantages becoming an associate might create. There is a risk that the associate partner would stop running some qualifications that the College delivers or may not have qualifications that offer progression from level 3 provision, but this would be discussed during the due diligence process to ensure appropriate mitigations are put in place. The benefit of a reduction in administration outweighs the potential risks relating to committing to one partner. Courses that are currently run with other institutions' validation would be completed and then replaced.

Higher education income is currently £1.9m per year. The business planning process will consider the impact of the changes in the strategy and there will be a period where curriculum remodelling takes place, which may see slower growth. It is expected that at least £2.1m income will be achieved in 2025/26.

The Governing Board thanked colleagues for their work on this strategy, which was important to refresh the higher education offer at the College. Governors queried how this new strategy will be communicated. The changes to the offer will be communicated directly to the target audience, both students and employers, to show how they have responded to their needs.

RESOLVED: The board approved the College's Higher Education Strategy.

313 Modern Slavery Statement

This report provided an overview of the College's efforts and commitment to combat modern slavery and human trafficking in compliance with the Modern Slavery Act. Governors were reminded to complete the mandatory training on modern slavery on the College's SmartLog system.

RESOLVED: The board approved the Modern Slavery Statement and Policy, as recommended by the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.

Alun Owen, Andrew Lang, Jen McGill and Paul Growney left the meeting.

314 Governance update

The report contained an update on a number of matters relating to governance at the College, which have been considered by the Search and Governance Committee, including the governance action plan, governor training plan and governor roles.

RESOLVED: **The board noted the updates to the governance action plan.**

The board noted that the that the Governing Board was compliant with the Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance for English Colleges 2021 between 1 August 2023 and 31 July 2024 and is compliant with the adopted Association of Colleges' Code of Good Governance 2024.

The board approved the recommended plan for governor training sessions.

The board approved the extension of terms for Paul Growney and Natalie Ibbs to the full four years.

The board noted the appointment of Paul Growney as Skills Link Governor and approved his appointment to the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

The board ratified the decision taken between meetings to appoint Alison Cannon to the Audit Committee.

315 <u>Corporate risk register</u>

The report presented proposed amendments to the corporate risk register for approval. One risk that had emerged since the risk register was scrutinised by the Audit Committee related to the potential clawback of bursary funding.

RESOLVED: **The board approved the updated Corporate Risk Register.**

316 <u>Policies</u>

The report presents a number of policies for approval, following consideration at committee level where relevant.

RESOLVED: **The board approved the:**

- **Conflicts of Interest Policy**
- **Safeguarding Policy**
- **Prevent Strategy**
- **Academic Malpractice and Maladministration Policy**

317 <u>Link governor update</u>

All updates were covered in the meeting.

318 <u>Committee chairs update</u>

All updates were covered in the meeting.

Simon Pierce, Tracey Turner, Travis Brown, Fego Orughele, Stephanie Donaldson, Mohammed Ramzan, Philip Grant and Carys Bibby left the meeting.

319 <u>Performance and remuneration update</u>

The report presented the annual Remuneration Report in line with the requirements of the adopted Senior Post Holder Remuneration Code. The report set out the rationale for a decision taken between meetings to change the contractual terms of conditions of the Governance Director, in order for her to take on additional duties as the College's Data Protection Officer (DPO). Governors were also presented with appraisal documentation for Senior Post Holders for review.

RESOLVED: **The board approved the annual report of the Remuneration Committee and noted that it will be published on the College's website.**

[redacted]

The board noted the contents of the appraisal documentation and approved outline targets for Senior Post Holders for 2024/25.

Simon Pierce and Carys Bibby rejoined the meeting.

320 <u>Any other business</u>

There were no items of other business.

321 <u>Date of next meeting</u>

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on 6 February 2025 at 3.00pm.