

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes from the meeting held at the Stockbridge Lane Campus, Knowsley

Thursday 11 December 2025 at 4.00pm

Present:	Phil Han	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Jim Pinsent	External Governor
	Natalie Ibbs	External Governor
	Zulakha Desai	External Governor
	Liz Duncan	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Ann Marr	External Governor
	Alistair Greer	External Governor
	Doug Laver	External Governor (via Microsoft Teams)
	Wayne Longshaw	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor
	Emilia Lulek	Student Governor
	Thomas Carey	Student Governor
In attendance:	Stephanie Donaldson	Deputy Chief Executive
	Sue Hutchinson	Menzies (via Microsoft Teams)
	Carys Bibby	Governance Director (minutes)

2526/15 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received for Clare Milsom and Jen McGill.

2526/16 Declarations of interest

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

2526/17 Minutes of previous meetings held on 16 October 2025

Minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record, subject to one change to reflect that Ann Marr was not in attendance.

2526/18 Matters arising and action tracker

RESOLVED: The board noted the action tracker updates.

2526/19 Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan (incorporating Performance and Compliance)

Mohammed Ramzan was not in attendance due to the ongoing Ofsted inspection. Simon Pierce presented the Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan. Changes recommended through the Self-Assessment Review Workshop and Curriculum and Quality Committee had been incorporated and these were recommended for approval by the committee. The first review of actions taken against curriculum area quality improvement plans was taking place, which would inform commentary in the college level quality improvement plan.

Wayne Longshaw joined the meeting.

The Self-Assessment Report and Quality Improvement Plan had been scrutinised by current Ofsted inspectors and their recommendations for further refinements had been incorporated. The Self-Assessment Report was prepared against the new Ofsted inspection toolkit, which now has no overall judgement grade. This toolkit is being used by Ofsted inspectors during the current inspection. Areas which are judged to be needing attention may result in a monitoring visit but not necessarily a full re-inspection. Governors noted that the triggers for Further Education Commissioner intervention have also been amended according to the new framework.

Governors queried whether the Self-Assessment Report should include any information on student recruitment. Whilst recruitment is an indication that the College's curriculum is suited to the needs of prospective students and that the reputation of the College is good, this is not directly linked to the quality of teaching and outcomes. Recruitment and financial performance are scrutinised through the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee. The board discussed that the number of new enrolments for young people did not increase in 2025/26 and that there was a greater proportion of student progressions. Leaders will analyse reasons that prospective students may choose other providers and use this information to influence curriculum planning and marketing strategies.

The board reflected on the increase in achievement rates, retention and pass rates which was considered to be impressive. It was discussed that further improvements are required but that the stronger performance indicates a culture shift and strong teaching and learning, which will enable this.

RESOLVED: The board approved the College Self-Assessment Report for 2024/25 and the associated College Quality Improvement Plan for 2025/26.

2526/20 Principal's Report (Incorporating Performance and Compliance)

The report provided a summary of current activity and presented a new format dashboard for 2025/26, with more graphical representation. Governors welcomed the new format and noted that more work was needed to present HR data from previous years.

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[REDACTED]

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 2025/26 and projections for 2026/27.

The board approved a pay award for all staff (excluding senior post holders) of up to 6% [REDACTED] and to increase the pay of the lowest paid staff to the real living wage of £13.45 per hour.

Tracey Turner and Sue Hutchinson joined the meeting. Ann Marr left the meeting.

2526/22 Financial statements and annual report

The report presented the financial statements and regularity questionnaire for approval. The draft management letter, including the external audit report produced by Menzies, and the Audit Committee Annual Report were also provided. The board of Waterside Training Limited approved its financial statements on 19 December 2025.

All adjustments agreed at the joint Audit and Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee meeting had been made, and all external audit work had been completed, pending receipt of the reconciliation of Liverpool City Region income. Menzies advised that they were not able to provide their final audit opinion until evidence of this reconciliation was provided.

The board queried the risk that the 31 December 2025 deadline for providing the signed financial statements to the Department for Education would be missed. As the reconciliation is provided by the Liverpool City Region as a third party and the College does not control when this information is received, Menzies committed to investigating if other assurance can be provided to allow them to complete their work and provide their final opinion. If this is not possible, the College can request an extension for submitting the accounts from the Department for Education.

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, subject to the finalisation of the audit outcomes resulting in no material changes.**

The board noted the management letter for the year ending 31 July 2025.

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.

Simon Pierce left the meeting.

2526/23 Finance, Resources and Commercial report

The report presented the outcomes of the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee meeting on 20 November 2025. Management accounts to 30 September showed a strong forecast surplus of £1.6m and 'Good' financial health. Key updates included progress on capital projects and the People Strategy, which had helped to reduce staff turnover to 16.7%. Waterside Training reported positive financial performance. Sustainability efforts have lowered the College's carbon footprint. Risks around Higher Education enrolment, staff retention, and estates remain under review, while improved financial resilience and cash flow support future investment.

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

The board noted the management accounts for the period ended 30 September 2025.

The board approved the Medium-Term Financial Plan 2025–2028.

The board noted the annual Waterside Training update.

2526/24 Audit Committee report

The report provided an overview of Audit Committee meeting on 20 November 2025. Internal auditors provided substantial assurance on payroll, with one minor recommendation, and highlighted new fraud legislation and cyber risks. The committee approved its annual report, reviewed whistleblowing and fraud cases, and endorsed the DfE regularity questionnaire. Internal audit recommendations are being implemented, with one extension granted. The risk management framework review was postponed to March 2026 to align with new software.

The committee recommended the corporate risk register with no changes to risk scores proposed; Higher Education enrolment remains a key risk. The board discussed whether strike action should be added to the risk register. It was agreed that given the short-term nature of the risk it should not be added to the register, but that senior managers should complete work to mitigate any implications of the industrial action, particularly around external assessments.

The board queried the impact that the changes to the Employment Rights Bill would have for the College and whether this needed to be made explicit in the risk register. It was noted that, in the compliance report, a small number of 12-month probationary reviews were outstanding. The board requested further information on the actions the College is taking to prepare for the Employment Rights Bill are brought to the next Governing Board meeting, via the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

The board approved the corporate risk register.

Doug Laver left the meeting.

2526/12 Curriculum and Quality Committee report

The Curriculum and Quality Committee had met three times since October. All governors had been invited to a session to approve curriculum targets for 2025/26, which analysed 2024/25 outcomes and focused on raising achievement rates above national averages and improving attendance, retention, and English/Maths results. Eight of nine priorities in the 2024/25 Quality Improvement Plan were achieved. Positive increases were noted in student voice engagement and employer satisfaction, which reached 95%. Higher Education performance remains strong, with 56% of students achieving a 2:1 degree or above. The committee recommended approval of safeguarding, Prevent, EDI, and HE attendance policies. Overall, improvements in teaching quality, retention, and careers guidance were enhancing student outcomes and experience.

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

The board noted curriculum targets for 2025/26.

The board approved the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Prevent Strategy.

The board approved the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy.

The board approved the Higher Education Student Attendance and Withdrawal Policy.

Tracey Turner, Emilia Lulek, Thomas Carey, Stephanie Donaldson and Carys Bibby left the meeting.

2526/15 Performance and Remuneration Committee report

The report presented the annual Remuneration Report in line with the requirements of the College's adopted code of governance, alongside appraisal documentation and targets for senior postholders and a recommendation from the committee on senior postholder pay.

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

The board noted the remuneration committee annual report.

The board approved a pay award for senior post holders in line with that of all staff.

The board approved appraisal documentation and 2025/26 targets for senior post holders; the Principal, Governance Director, Deputy CEO/CFO and Deputy Principal.

Tracey Turner, Emilia Lulek, Thomas Carey, Stephanie Donaldson and Carys Bibby re-joined the meeting.

2526/13 Search and Governance Committee report

The report presented the discussion at Search and Governance Committee meeting on 1 December 2025 and confirmed full compliance with the AoC Code of Good Governance.

The committee recommended approval of the 2025/26 governance action plan, governor training plan, and several appointments, including Cath Fogarty as external governor to replace Jim Pinsent. The Chair of the Committee provided an overview of the interview process in May, following which the selection panel had recommended Cath's appointment should another vacancy arise.

Amendments to allow up to 14 external governors and committee membership changes were discussed. The board discussed that a larger cohort of external governors would reduce the risk of inquorate committees being unable to effectively discharge their duties.

The committee emphasised succession planning and external training opportunities to strengthen governance. These actions aim to enhance board effectiveness, mitigate governance-related risks, and indirectly improve student outcomes.

RESOLVED: The board noted the report.

The board noted compliance against the Association of Colleges Code of Good Governance.

The board approved:

- **The governance action plan.**
- **The governor training plan.**
- **A one-year extension of Alison Cannon's term to 1 January 2027.**
- **The appointment of Cath Fogarty as an external governor from 12 December 2025.**
- **An amendment to the Instrument and Articles of Government to allow for up to 14 external governors.**
- **The appointment of Wayne Longshaw to the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee.**
- **An extension to a full 4-year term for the Curriculum and Quality Co-opted Members, Isabel Lucas and Paul Oginsky.**

2526/14 Link governor update

The Safeguarding Link Governor confirmed that the number of mental health cases reported to and actioned by the Safeguarding Team so far this academic year remained high at 272. The number of referrals linked to poverty and domestic violence had also increased this year. The Safeguarding Team remain well qualified and supported to assist students.

On careers, the board queried progress against the Gatsby benchmarks, which are reviewed three times per year and requested that the Careers Link Governor bring an update to the next Governing Board meeting.

The next meeting of the Environmental Sustainability Steering Group is planned for 15 January 2026, following which the Environmental Sustainability Link Governor will provide an update on activity.

The Health and Safety Link Governor reported no issues and continued to meet regularly with the Health and Safety Committee and Health and Safety Manager.

RESOLVED: The board noted the updates.

Any other business.

Governors thanked Jim Pinsent for his service during his tenure

Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Governing Board will be held on 5 February 2025 (Strategy Day).