

St Helens College

GOVERNING BOARD

Minutes of the meeting held at the Town Centre Campus, St Helens Thursday 16 March 2023 at 3.30pm

Present:	Bill Nixon (Chair)	External Governor
	Alison Cannon	External Governor
	Zulakha Desai	External Governor
	Liz Duncan	External Governor
	John Heritage	External Governor
	Adam Humphreys	Student Governor
	Andrew Lang	External Governor
	Kellie McCann	Student Governor
	Jen McGill	Staff Governor
	Alun Owen	External Governor
	Simon Pierce	Chief Executive/Principal
	Tracey Turner	Staff Governor
In attendance:	Kevin Standish	Senior Interim Manager – Curriculum and Quality
	Nick Gribben	Vice Principal – Higher Education and Further Education
	Ian Johnson	Head of Finance
	Gillian Hayhurst	Governance Director (minutes)

The meeting opened at 3.34pm.

107 Apologies for absence

Apologies were received from Jim Pinsent, David Balsamo, Nick Shore and Phil Han.

108 In camera session: Senior staffing update

Following on from the Search and Governance Committee meeting in February 2023, an in camera session was held with external governors. A private and confidential addendum to the minutes is available from the Governance Director on request.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the senior staffing update.

Jen McGill, Kellie McCann, Adam Humphreys, Tracey Turner, Kevin Standish and Nick Gribben joined the meeting.

The Chair welcomed Kevin Standish to the meeting.

Debbie Calderbank had resigned from her position as External Governor and Chair of the Audit Committee in January 2023. On behalf of the board, the Chair thanked Debbie for her contribution.

109 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest to note.

110 Minutes of the previous meetings

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 January 2023, including the private and confidential addendum, were approved as an accurate record.

111 Matters arising and action tracker

The Governing Board noted the action tracker updates.

112 Chair's report

The Chair updated the governors on Knowsley Better Together and the Ofsted inspection.

Following their involvement in the Ofsted inspection, the Chair concluded that the grading reflected their experience. Variations in practice across the College regarding professional development and the quality of teaching had been evident. Comments from the lead inspector were positive and Ofsted acknowledged the improvements made since the last inspection. The board had already identified areas that require increased focus now that the College's financial position has improved. Steps are being taken to ensure a greater emphasis on curriculum and board are becoming more aware of and challenging quality issues.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Chair's update.

113 Ofsted inspection feedback

The Governing Board received a presentation following the Ofsted inspection held in March 2023.

Many of the issues raised by Ofsted had already been identified through the Quality Improvement Plan and performance reporting, however senior leaders acknowledged that these are more widespread than originally understood.

The feedback in each area was discussed. Attendance, retention and achievement rates were a consistent theme. Inspectors had validated data for the College at the start of the inspection week but did not have access to benchmarking data at that time. Use of starting points, inconsistent feedback on marked work, formative assessment and a lack of ambition was a challenge in some areas. The College was judged to have made a reasonable contribution to meeting skills needs, although more work is needed to evidence employer input into all curriculums. With regard to personal development, the inspectors found that not all students received consistent, high-quality careers advice.

Feedback from students praised the pastoral curriculum, with students feeling safe from sexual harassment and violence. Safeguarding provision was well understood.

Twenty stakeholders were interviewed by inspectors, including the local authority, voluntary organisations, chambers of commerce and employers. Overall, the feedback was positive.

The final report will be published by Ofsted by the start of April 2023. In the meantime, the Wider Leadership Team is meeting to draft the post-inspection action plan. Based on the published reinspection timetable, Ofsted will return within 7 – 13 months for a monitoring visit and within 30 months for a full inspection. Governors acknowledged the pressure on Ofsted to inspect all colleges by 2025, which may impact on how long it is before the College has its next full inspection.

The Governing Board queried whether there was any correlation between attendance rates and the quality of College facilities being used. There has been no direct correlation identified and some schools with classes held within older buildings have higher attendance than others.

As the quality of teaching was variable among schools, continuing professional development will now have a greater focus on pedagogy in addition to occupational professional development. In the short-term, staff will be focusing on retaining students and preparing them for assessments and examinations.

In response to a query on how senior leaders will manage the reputational risk of the inspection outcome with stakeholders, the Governing Board was informed that proactive engagement arrangements will be made to coincide with the publication of the report. Anecdotally, many organisations have excellent links with the College and are unlikely to be concerned with the overall inspection rating as long as individual service standards and relationships are maintained.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Ofsted inspection feedback.

Nick Gribben left the meeting.

114 Verbal report of Link Governors

Verbal updates were provided by the Link Governors for Safeguarding, Health and Safety, Careers, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

New link arrangements were confirmed just prior to the Ofsted inspection and governors will meet with lead staff under the new framework.

The Governing Board was reminded of the work undertaken by the Safeguarding Team and asked that continuous support is provided to its members.

A new Health and Safety Manager has been appointed.

Alun Owen left the meeting.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the Link Governor updates.

115 **Performance and compliance update**

This report provides a summary of progress against key performance indicators (KPIs) and compliance report.

The College has received confirmation that it is no longer in post-intervention monitoring support (PIMS). The letter received from the Department for Education was complimentary of the progress the College has made and recognised the good work of governors, the senior leadership team and staff.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted progress against the high-level KPIs and targets for 2022/23.

The Governing Board approved the proposed approach to updating the College's Operational Plan, 2022/23.

The Governing Board noted the compliance report.

The Governing Board noted that the letter from the Department for Education has confirmed that the College is no longer in Post-Intervention Monitoring Support.

Ian Johnson joined the meeting during the next item.

116 **College Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)**

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

The Governing Board supported the introduction of the new format as it was easier to read and identify areas where actions had been undertaken. The Curriculum and Quality Committee had met earlier in the day and requested that more judgements on the data and assessments of the impact of actions are included in future iterations.

The Governing Board requested that the post-inspection action plan items are added to the QIP, rather than operating two separate plans. This will support strategic assessment of the issues to reduce the risk of assessing challenges in silos.

Regarding the complete column, governors noted that 'no' meant that no evidence was provided. Completed actions will be clearly marked in the future.

RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the progress recorded in the Quality Improvement Plan.

Zulakha Desai and Kevin Standish left the meeting.

117 Management accounts for the period ending 31 January 2023

The report presented the St Helens College Group management accounts for the six months ending 31 January 2023 for consideration. The Governing Board noted that the accounts had not received the usual scrutiny from the Finance, Resources and Commercial Committee due to a road incident resulting in the last-minute cancellation of the meeting.

The draft February 2023 management accounts are showing a further deficit of between £80k-£100k due to a reduction in apprenticeship income and increase in professional fees. The electrical substation at the town centre campus is likely to cost more than provided for within the capital expenditure budget.

The College has received confirmation that it will receive £930k T-level equipment grant, increasing the cash position to almost £4m at year end. The board queried whether there would be any clawback of this grant should recruitment numbers fall below target. There is a risk of revenue clawback but it is unlikely to affect capital expenditure grant funding, as this is a longer-term investment. There is a risk of not spending the grant within the allotted timeframe and this is being managed by ensuring suppliers raise purchase orders in a timely manner.

Tracey Turner left the meeting for a short period.

Due to the improved cash position, the financial health score is likely to increase to 160 points at year end. High-level budget planning is underway for 2023/24. Increased 16-18 funding and the anticipated reduction in energy costs is likely to have a positive impact on the next year's financial position.

Alison Cannon left the meeting for a short period.

In response to a query on recruitment for 2023/24, the Governing Board was advised that numbers are on track, but that it is too early to rely on this data. Since the removal of teacher-assessed grading post-pandemic, some school pupils are not achieving their expected grades and are therefore not meeting the entry criteria for other institutions, bolstering the College's recruitment levels.

The Governing Board discussed the likelihood of multiple risks crystallising and the financial impact this could have. Several income streams, including small group tuition, will end in the next couple of years. This will impact on cash flow and the assumptions made for the proposed new T-level building. Other options regarding the College's estate are being identified and will be presented to the Governing Board for future discussion.

Liz Duncan left the meeting for a short period.



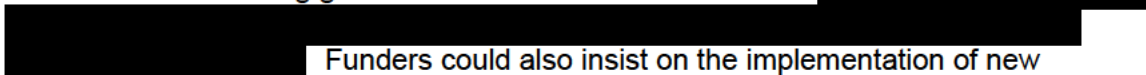
RESOLVED: The Governing Board noted the management accounts for the six months ending 31 January 2023.

118 **Estates update**

The Governing Board was advised that a discussion session has been dedicated to estates at the away day on 21 March 2023.



Other risk factors, such as funder permissions and the Department for Education's option to transfer restructuring grant funds into loan were discussed.



Funders could also insist on the implementation of new covenants, which could be a limiting factor.

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

Ian Johnson left the meeting.

119 **Internal audit contract**

Following completion of a tendering exercise, the report recommended the appointment of its new internal audit service from 2023/24.

The Chair of the Audit Committee, who took part in the tender process, provided feedback. Senior leaders will contact ICCA, the College's current internal auditor, to clarify that the Governing Board has been content with the service it has received but it is an appropriate time for a fresh, independent perspective.

RESOLVED: **The board approved the recommendation of the Audit Committee to appoint TIAA Limited as the internal audit service from 1 June 2023 – 31 May 2026.**

The Governing Board noted that the internal audit contract may be extended for a further 24-month period (2 x 1 year), subject to satisfactory performance and approval.

120 **Governance update**

The report provided an update to the governance action plan, proposed terms of reference for an Environmental Sustainability Working Group, proposed terms of reference for a new, joint, Curriculum and Quality and Higher Education Committee and an update on Link Governors and the Audit Committee.

RESOLVED: **The Governing Board noted the updates to the governance action plan and accept the Search and Governance Committee's recommendation to include the additional actions relating to the College's compliance with the 2021 Code of Governance.**

The Governing Board approved the terms of reference for the Environmental Sustainability Working Group at appendix 2.

The Governing Board approved the merger of the Curriculum and Quality Committee and Higher Education Committee under the new terms of reference at appendix 3.

121 Policy update

The report presented the following policies for consideration:

- Code of Conduct
- Emergency Plan
- Speak Up Policy (formerly Whistleblowing Policy)
- Complaints Policy
- Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy
- Higher Education Tuition Fee Policy
- Higher Education Admissions Policy
- The Policy and Procedure for the Management of Course Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study
- Student Protection Policy
- Accompanying information and conditions of offer policy
- Course Closure Form
- Provider Access Policy (ratification)

RESOLVED: The Governing Board approved the revised Code of Conduct and delegate future reviews of this document to the Search and Governance Committee for recommendation to the Governing Board. If approved, the Standing Orders and Scheme of Delegation will be updated to reflect this delegation.

The Governing Board approved the updates to the Emergency Plan.

The Governing Board approved the updates to the Speak Up Policy (formerly Whistleblowing Policy).

The Governing Board approved the Complaints Policy.

The Governing Board resolved to accept the use of the current Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Policy until July 2023 to allow time for a comprehensive review.

The Governing Board approved the Tuition Fee Policy.

The Governing Board approved the Admissions Policy.

The Governing Board approved the Policy and Procedure for the Management of Course Closure or Suspension of a Programme of Study.

The Governing Board approved the current version of the Accompanying information and Conditions of Offer Policy, noting that no amendments were required.

The Governing Board approved the Course Closure Form, noting that no amendments were required.

The Governing Board ratified the decision taken between meetings by the Chair and Vice Chair of Governors to approve the Provider Access Policy.

123 **Risk management update**

The report provided proposed amendments to the corporate risk register for consideration.

The Governing Board was informed that the Interim Director of Human Resources had attended the last Audit Committee meeting where a deep dive into the people risk (risk 15) was undertaken. The board acknowledged that this risk has now crystallised and had been highlighted on the risk register.

The Risk Management Group is meeting in July 2023 to refresh the risk register. Governors were invited to attend the meeting.

The Governing Board requested that the Risk Management Group consider risk 14 and whether the impact and likelihood ratings are appropriate.

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

124 **Committee minutes and verbal update from committee chairs**

The Governing Board was presented with the approved committee minutes and updates from committee chairs.

The Performance and Remuneration Committee has been focusing on staff appraisals and developing future reporting for accurate monitoring.

The Audit Committee Chair provided feedback on the Education and Skills Funding Agency's funding audit outcome and congratulated staff for their hard work.

The Higher Education Committee meeting was cancelled due to Ofsted. It has not been possible to reschedule this meeting prior to its merger with the Curriculum and Quality Committee.

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

125 **Any other business**

The Governing Board received an update on negotiations with trade unions. Two additional requests have been received for consideration; for the College to commit to becoming a real living wage employer and for the £500 non-consolidated payment made in December 2022 to be consolidated from the start of 2023/24.



Date and time of the next meeting

The next meetings of the Governing Board are:

- Away day – 21 March 2023
- Strategic board discussion – 11 May 2023
- Termly performance meeting – 6 July 2023

The meeting closed at 6.00pm.