



A meeting of the Hart Schools Trust Board was held on Wednesday 28 September 2022 starting at 09.00, in the Conference Room, the Thomas Alleyne Academy (TAA) Stevenage and by videoconference.

PRESENT

Andrew Simmons (Chair)
Hilary Clifford
Kit Davies (Vice-chair) (by videoconference)

Geoff Cleverdon (by videoconference)
Jonathan Ellam (by videoconference)
Socrates Karidis
Mark Lewis (Chief Executive)

IN ATTENDANCE

Paul Harte (Group Finance Director)

Robert Dale (Company Secretary/Clerk)

ITEM 1A: APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Vicky Parsey.

ITEM 1B: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- The Chair declared that he was Chair of the Corporation Board for North Hertfordshire College and Trustee of another Multi-academy Trust (the Agora Learning Partnership).
- Kit Davies declared that he was a member of the Board of WENTA and had joined the Board of the Hertfordshire Virtual School. Jonathan Ellam declared that he was employed by HFL Education (formerly Herts for Learning) as a governance advisor.
- Socrates Karidis had been appointed a Director of Coventry University On-line (CU Online) and Coventry University Recruitment and Admissions (CURA). These were part of the same Group as his existing declarations and were not considered to materially change the risk of a conflict of interest arising.


ITEM 1C: MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

- The minutes of the meeting held on 13 July 2022 were agreed as an accurate record and would be signed accordingly.

ITEM 1D: MATTERS ARISING/ACTIONS

- These had been addressed as follows:
 - Consider how to use lessons from the ETF evaluation process in reviewing the effectiveness of the Trust Board. **Action under way.** Four members had returned effectiveness review questionnaires to date. Results suggest general satisfaction, but with some concerns about the level of Board engagement, more focus to Board discussions and more progress on Trust development. A more detailed discussion will be scheduled for the next meeting.
 - Create recruitment plan for at least two Trustees – including a local governing body Chair and an audit & risk Chair – and four Members with the aim of making

appointments by the start of the autumn term. **Action complete.** Interviews with four Trustee candidates are to take place in early October.

- Complete work on the revised Instrument and Articles of Association for the Trust and confirm ESFA approval prior to submission to the Trust Board in July 2022. **Action under way.** The revised Instrument and Articles have been prepared; revised funding agreements are also in draft. There are a couple of points relating to the TAA estate which need to be resolved – concerning the freehold land – before these are finalised.
- Seek feedback from Buzzacott (external auditors) on the impact of the refusal of ESFA to approve the Related Party Transaction with the Hart Learning Group. **Action under way.** This has been identified in the year end strategy presented to the Audit & Risk Committee as a point of review during the external audit but there are no known issues other than the need to declare the position.
- Make arrangements to appoint Andrew McLeod as Trust CFO and transfer his employment from the Hart Learning Group to the Hart Schools Trust. **Action complete.** The paperwork had been completed for this change.
- Amend the job title for Mark Lewis's role as Trust Managing Director to Trust Chief Executive Officer. **Action complete.** This change had been implemented.
-  Redacted s43 (2)
- Review options for placing some cash deposits in interest-bearing accounts. **Action under way.** Care needed to be taken because of restrictions on the management of public money in this way and further advice is being considered.
- Update Safeguarding/Child Protection Policies for both schools and submit to LGBs and Board for approval. **Action complete.** These had been approved and added to the school websites.
- Prepare progress report [on following up actions from the Safeguarding Internal Audit Report] for next meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee. **Action under way.** This report will be made to the November meeting. All recommendations of the Safeguarding Audit had been implemented (including a knowledge test with the annual training, improved signage and a 'concerns list' – which had actually been used during the disciplinary case completed earlier in the year).

Question: *Who would take over as Safeguarding Governor at Roebuck?* Mark Lewis would take over the role for the Roebuck LGB until recruitment of a new Chair had been completed.

- Amend the risk register to include risks associated with teacher and staff pay. **Action complete.** These risks were being monitored; the Audit & Risk Committee had agreed that they could stay off the register for now.

ITEM 2: DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

- This paper was a standard annual reminder in respect of declarations of interest and eligibility. Trustees were asked to provide a written confirmation that the interests recorded on the register are correct or to provide an updated statement. A separate reminder would be issued to members after the meeting.
- The Trust Board accepted the report.

ITEM 3: SUMMER 2022 GCSE AND A-LEVEL RESULTS – ANALYSIS

- Results for the year had been better than forecast, and comparisons with data from SISRA analytics (a business providing data analysis to schools across England) allowed the school's Progress 8 position to be estimated. This suggested that the outcome for 2021/22 was -0.13 – substantially better than the 2018/19 outcome (-0.58) and our forecast (-0.47). The number of strong passes and high grades was also up on 2018/19.
- This year is the 'best fit' comparator because it was the last when public examinations took place before the COVID-19 emergency. Grade boundaries were said to have been set as a 'mid point' between the 2018/19 outcomes and those from teacher-assessed grades in 2020/21.
- There was a range of performance between departments and actions were being taken to bring lower-performing areas up to the standard of better-performing areas. In addition, there was a strong focus on the attendance and achievement gap apparent between Pupil Premium (PP) and non Pupil Premium learners. This was a national and Hertfordshire gap – so not exclusively a Trust issue - but one the schools wanted to tackle. For this year's Y11, monitoring attendance and identifying intervention needs had begun already. Local Governing Body meetings would be taking place in early October and these remained active, engaged and good at drilling down into how each school was identifying individual learner needs and appropriate interventions.

Question: *What opportunities were there for linking the Trust with best practice institutions in respect of work with PP learners?* The Chief Executive at West Suffolk College was a very good contact on this kind of activity and had developed interactions with local schools.

Action: Facilitate contact between Trust leadership and best practice organisations (such as West Suffolk College).

- Trustees noted that the schools had around 27% of pupils classified as disadvantaged. This was large enough to create substantial challenges, but not so large that practice could be substantially focussed on the learners. The Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (Liz Shapland) who had visited TAA earlier in the term had not been able to identify good practice examples from the Hertfordshire area.

Question: *Would the TAA P8 outcome in 2022/23 be positive?* Given that grade boundaries were being rebased this year to return to 2018/19 levels it was hard to predict results. The cohort was comparatively strong. It was recognised that support from the RSC for Trust growth would be easier to gain if outcomes were better.

Question: *To what extent were outcome improvements this year related to better teaching or more capable learners?* Class by class analysis was carried out; the impact of stronger teaching could potentially be identified. It should be recorded, however, that the 2021/22 Y11 cohort had given cause for concern (with some high levels of non-attendance) during the year.

Question: *Considerable effort had been made to improve the performance of the English department; although Language outcomes had improved, Literature outcomes remained disappointing. What more was needed?* A number of re-marks had been requested – as some of results had been surprising. However, the indication was that more 'writing stamina' was necessary. This had undoubtedly been affected by disruption to learning arising from the COVID-19 emergency but needed to be mitigated.

Question: *Were there areas of improvement at TAA which should be celebrated?* Business had improved by an average of a grade since the last public examinations. Art had also

improved. Science and Maths were both continuing strengths for TAA. In contrast, Spanish was not encouraging student aspiration and the approach was being challenged.

Question: *How were the specialist subject issues to be addressed?* Modern Foreign Languages (MFL) was a particularly difficult challenge; it was hard to recruit good quality teachers and learners did not necessarily respond well to the presentation of language study as 'difficult'. Other subjects might present themselves as more enjoyable. Nonetheless, the school did well with subjects – such as science and Maths – that were traditionally perceived as hard.

- A-level outcomes had been in line with expectations albeit with one or two disappointing results. The coming year would have a smaller Y13 relative to Y12 and work was under way with subject leaders to ensure that the smaller cohort received sufficient focus.

Question: *How did less capable learners fare in comparison with stronger students in subjects where teaching to the top was embedded?* In most cases, their performance was lifted, but there was still an achievement gap. In MFL, teaching might be 'safe' and focussed on behaviour rather than inspiring students.

- There was a good range of positive destinations including apprenticeships, high quality employment and universities; these were almost all first choice destinations. School promotion should highlight the excellent progression achieved, including following the LEP's Hertfordshire Apprenticeship Strategy. Clearing was becoming a normal route for choosing an HE destination, with Russell Group institutions also taking learners through this path; it was not merely a fall-back any more.

Question: *Had the Cambridge offer been achieved?* Unfortunately, the candidate had missed out – one of their grades had since been remarked and was an A rather than the B first awarded. Lots of support had been given before interview and as part of the exam preparation process. The candidate had gone on to another good quality offer obtained through clearing.

Action: Circulate the LEP Apprenticeship Strategy.

- The Trust Board accepted the report.

ITEM 4: HST PERFORMANCE UPDATE – SEPTEMBER 2022

- The September 2022 YR and Y7 intakes at both Roebuck and TAA had been at (or above) the PAN for both schools and Y12 (at 60) was the largest it had been for some time. The Open evening at TAA had gone well and applications for September 2023 were at a high level. There had been a large number of in-year admissions, including two learners with no English, some through the Fair Access protocol; it was felt that some local secondary schools were 'encouraging' some learners to move schools at Y10. This created significant disruption to established year groups.
- The 'Character Education' kitemark assessment visit for TAA would take place after the Board meeting, but the team was confident that there was a very strong narrative. Roebuck was reviewing its Maths curriculum (although it had worked very well) because the resources were no longer being produced in the UK.
- A visit from the Hertfordshire Improvement Partner (Liz Shapland) at TAA had concluded that it remained a very good school that continued to improve. Behaviour in lessons and unstructured time was excellent and Liz was impressed with the way that core values ran through the school and with the developments in our character curriculum since last year.

- There were some areas for improvement, including a more strategic approach to supporting learners with special educational needs and disability (SEND) and continuing to close the gap in attainment and progress between our pupil premium and non-pupil premium students. The school also needed to continue to develop its work on supporting reading, particularly for the weakest readers.
- An anonymous complaint had been made during the summer to Ofsted about TAA. Because the complainant had not given permission for details to be disclosed, it was not known whether a particular incident or incidents had given rise to the complaint and it did not appear that the complainant had used any of the Trust's internal processes. All that was known was that the complaint concerned the school's handling of bullying issues and suicidal ideation. Ofsted had passed the complaint on to the local authority which had engaged HFL Education to investigate; a visit to the school would take place on 30 September. A number of 'case studies' would be provided for the HFL Education representative to review and they would also look at school policies, practices and reporting. The school was confident in the strength and quality of its support for learners.

Question: *Were the eleven new appointments for new roles?* No. One was a new role and the others replaced colleagues who had moved on. It was pleasing to note that several were former students from the school.

Question: *Was the school aware of Lewis Hamilton's charity (Mission 44) which was keen to run a three to five-year project in Stevenage?* No; Trustees suggested that the work on personal development at both schools (including character education) might be a good fit.

Action: Make contact with Mission 44 to discuss opportunities.

Question: *Was the Board aware of a Governor conference on SEND on 5 November?* This would cover effective governance for SEND and included a session on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. Details would be circulated after the meeting.

Action: Circulate details of the event to the Board.

- **The HST Board was very pleased** with a strong start to the term, and the excellent position at Roebuck.

ITEM 5: RISK REGISTER

- The main area of risk post mitigation remained energy costs. TAA depended upon biomass fuel for its heating (not covered by the energy price guarantee) but deliveries were not a concern – just costs. Discussions with the supplier (Cryotherm) were in progress about this.

Action: Report to next meeting about energy costs.

- Risks associated with the unfunded cost of pay awards and the potential for disruption from strike action were actively monitored but not on the Risk Register.
- **The Trust Board endorsed** the latest iteration of the Risk Register.

ITEM 6: AUDIT & RISK CHAIR'S REPORT

- The Audit & Risk Committee had on 21 September 2022 when it had discussed the proposed year-end audit strategy. Fieldwork was expected to start on 17 October, with an initial report to the Audit & Risk Committee on 30 November and then a presentation to the Board on 6 December 2022.
- The proposed audit fee for the 2021/22 audit was £19,795 (2020/21: £19,000). This represented a 4% increase year-on-year overall and the Committee was satisfied that this was reasonable.
- **The HST Board accepted** the A&R Committee's recommendation **and approved** the audit fee for 2021/22.
- The committee had discussed benchmarking data from similar Trusts provided by ESFA. This was for 2020/21 and it was evident that much depended upon the nature of the Trusts being compared. The main element on which the Trust was an outlier related to operating reserves – which the Board was aware of and addressing over time. The historic deficit had largely arisen because of urgent investment needs to catch-up with repair and maintenance backlogs dating back before conversion.
- Finally, the committee had discussed the complaint made to Ofsted and the anticipated investigation visit which the CEO had now reported on.
- The Trust Board accepted the report.

ITEM 7: P11 (JULY 2022) MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS

- Key points from the July 2022 management accounts were:
- A forecast year-end surplus of £257k, (£172k for TAA and £85k for Roebuck), giving rise to a reserves position of £217k (£46k TAA and £171k Roebuck). This was a step in the right direction and the Trust was aiming to improve the operating reserves position in the coming year.
- Buccaneers had made a net surplus of £37k up from £13k in the budget). This resulted from higher attendance levels than forecast, and lower staffing costs.
- Final 2021/22 accounts were being prepared for the audit, starting on 17 October.
- Since the July accounts pack had been completed, the TAA year-end forecast had dropped by £16k, due to the accrual of holiday pay (after a Supreme Court decision – Harpur Trust v Brazel) and extra estates work that took place over the summer.
- Roebuck's position had improved by £54k, due to releasing unrestricted funds against budgeted spend and justifying the release of restricted funds such as PE income against expenditure already incurred.
- The team had queried desktop valuations of the Trust's estate from ESFA (much lower than valuations received on conversion) to better understand the methodology. This would be discussed with the auditors during the year-end process. It was also noted that a recent FRS102 valuation for another education institution had shown a substantial improvement from the one received in 2021; it was possible that a valuation received by the Trust would also be somewhat better year on year.
- The Trust Board accepted the report.

ITEM 8: LOCAL GOVERNING BODY REPORTS

The Roebuck Academy

- The LGB was due to meet on 11 October. Elections for a new staff governor and a new parent governor had been carried out and new members would be joining the committee on that date. Recruitment for a new Chair was in hand but the Vice-chair had agreed to cover matters on an interim basis.

The Thomas Alleyne Academy

- The LGB was due to meet on 13 October. The recent meeting with Liz Shapland had been positive and school leaders were focussing on the right things. An election for a new parent governor would be arranged.
- The Trust Board accepted the reports.

ITEM 9: TRUST DEVELOPMENT

- [REDACTED]

- [REDACTED]

Redacted
s43 (2)

[REDACTED]

Question: *How much time was this activity taking away from the operational roles of CEO and headteacher?* Work was busy but not excessive; there were strong deputies at TAA and an excellent headteacher at Roebuck.

- Trustees noted that there remained little sustained pressure from policymakers to stimulate academy conversions except in the case of 'failing' schools.
- Trustees [REDACTED] encouraged Trust representatives to promote HST's strengths as part of this process.

Redacted
s43 (2)

ITEM 10: POLICIES REVIEW

HST Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference

- The Audit & Risk Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference at its recent meeting. It had concluding that no changes were required as a result of alterations to the Academy Trust Handbook and recommended that no change was made for 2022/23.
- **The Trust Board approved** the existing Terms of Reference for the Audit & Risk Committee for 2022/23.

ITEM 11: ANY OTHER BUSINESS

- None.

ITEM 12: DATE OF NEXT MEETING

- Tuesday 6 December 2022, at 08.30, following the Annual General Meeting, by videoconference (Microsoft Teams).

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Signed as an accurate record: Chair

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Date

ACTION LOG

Date	Item	What	Who	When
14/07/21	6.	Consider how to use lessons from the ETF evaluation process in reviewing the effectiveness of the Trust Board.	Robert Dale	30/09/21
25/05/22	2.	Complete work on the revised Instrument and Articles of Association for the Trust and confirm ESFA approval prior to submission to the Trust Board in July 2022.	Robert Dale	30/06/22
25/05/22	2.	Seek feedback from Buzzacott (external auditors) on the impact of the refusal of ESFA to approve the Related Party Transaction with the Hart Learning Group.	Paul Harte	31/07/22
13/07/22	2.	[REDACTED]	Mark Lewis	31/08/22
13/07/22	4.	Review options for placing some cash deposits in interest-bearing accounts.	Paul Harte/Andrew McLeod	31/08/22
28/09/22	3.	Facilitate contact between Trust leadership and best practice organisations (such as West Suffolk College).	Kit Davies	31/10/22
28/09/22	3.	Circulate the LEP Apprenticeship Strategy	Robert Dale	31/10/22
28/09/22	4.	Make contact with Mission 44 to discuss opportunities.	Mark Lewis	31/10/22
28/09/22	4.	Circulate details of the event to the Board.	Robert Dale	31/10/22
28/09/22	5.	Report to next meeting about energy costs.	Mark Lewis	31/10/22
28/09/22	9.	[REDACTED]	All Trustees	31/10/22

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s43 (2)

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