

MEETING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Minutes of the video conference meeting held at 19:45 hrs on 6 May 2021

Directors	Office	Term
* <i>Andrew Armour</i>		31/08/2025
Gary Benn		31/08/2025
Melissa Challinor	Vice Chair	31/08/2025
John Luke		31/08/2021
Sarah Mitchell	Executive Headteacher [EHT]	Ex-Officio
Andrew Taylor	Chair	31/08/2025
Liam Tobin	DPA LGB Governor	22/07/2023
<i>In attendance:</i>		
Tom Bennett	Clerk	
* <i>indicates absence</i>		

The EHT opened the meeting with a prayer.

Action

1/21 Apologies for absence

None.

2/21 Notification of AoB

None.

3/21 Notification of business interests

Gary Benn declared that his wife worked for GOMAT, and he worked for Eddisons who provided services to GOMAT.

No other director declared a potential conflict of interest on any matters to be discussed at the meeting or that they have received or given hospitality or a gift that could be perceived to compromise their impartiality when dealing with matters for the MAT.

4/21 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 December 2020 were approved as a true and accurate record of the meeting.

5/21 Matters Arising

All matters arising had been completed or were covered on the agenda.

MAIN BUSINESS

6/21 Governance

a) **New Director**

The Chair reported that following a call to find suitable persons who would be willing to join the Board of Directors, he had received the names of two people. He had met one of the persons interested in joining, Alison Meadows, who is a lawyer, lives in Great Chesterford and would add to the Board's skill base and diversity.

Following a proposal from the Chair, seconded by John Luke, it was **agreed** to recommend the appointment of Alison Meadows as Director for a four-year term of office to the Members of the Trust.

AT

b) Director Re-Appointments

The meeting noted that on 23 December 2020 the Trust's Members re-appointed Andrew Armour, Gary Benn, Melissa Challinor and Andrew Taylor as Directors for further terms ending 31/08/2025 and John Luke as a Director to 31/08/2021.

c) GCPA Staff Governors

It was noted the two staff governor vacancies at GCPA were advertised to all staff. Only two nominations were received and consequently Amy Sargeant and Natalie Starbuck were re-elected as staff governors for a further four-year term, subject to the Board's approval.

It was **agreed** to approve the appointment of Amy Sargeant and Natalie as staff governors for a further four-year term.

d) AGM

The Chair reported the Annual General Meeting was held on 12 February 2021. The meeting was attended by the current three members, the Chair, the Rev Tim Elbourne, the Director of Education at the Chelmsford Diocese, and the Rev Alex Jeewan, the representative of the deanery of Saffron Walden, nominated by the Diocese for the purpose.

The members were pleased with the operations and progress made at the Academies but were keen to see the Trust grow and take on more academies.

7/21 Strategy/ Future Plans

a) Update on discussions with the Federation

The Chair reported that he, Melissa Challinor and the EHT had had meetings with some of the governors and the senior leadership team at the Federation. The governors were still interested in the Federation joining GOMAT and had had meetings with staff and planned to go out to consultation with the community shortly.

As a result of the impact of Covid-19 on schools, the earliest now that it would be possible for the Federation to join GOMAT would be 1st January 2022.

The Board's representatives had discussed the Federation's finances and the concerns raised on the Federation's staff structure that was very "top-heavy". The Federation's governors were very open about the issue raised and agreed with the concerns and advised they would be addressing it.

The Federation had appointed a new part-time Business Manager who was having a positive impact on the management of the Federation's finances. The financial position of the Federation was better placed than originally identified and the Federation was on track to repay the loans provided to cover budget deficits.

There had been no feedback following the consultation meeting with the Federation's staff.

The Federation still had to provide updates on discussions with the Local Authority on the outstanding building works and funding needed to address other significant work on the premises.

It was **agreed** to follow up and report to the Board the feedback from the staff consultation and status of the outstanding building works.

b) MAT Expansion

See confidential minute.

c) Update on the Academies' Development Plans for 2020 – 2021

The meeting received and noted the progress made by each Academy, since the last meeting, in achieving their key priorities for the 2020 – 2021.

Chair/ EHT

No questions were raised.

d) Risk Registers

The meeting received and noted the individual risk registers for each Academy that had been consolidated within the MAT Risk Register.

The EHT highlighted those risks that had changed in likelihood and impact since the last meeting.

The likelihood and impact for risk from low admissions at each Academy had been increased as the current year admissions had been affected by a particularly low birth rate year in Uttlesford. Other schools in the area had also reported lower numbers applying meaning families were not being directed to their second-choice schools.

This would affect the General Annual Grant (GAG) income received and budget in 2022-23 at both academies.

8/21 Executive Head Teacher's [EHT's] Report

The meeting received and noted the report from the EHT on the operation and performance of the MAT including how well the academies were meeting the challenges of Covid-19.

The EHT reported the Trust was better placed and had gained a lot of knowledge from putting in place arrangements to provide a safe place for both staff and children at each Academy.

As previously discussed, the EHT highlighted the low birth rate across the Uttlesford District and lower confirmed admissions for Reception in September 2021. There had been some pupil movement to independent schools for their children because of smaller class sizes. It was noted the birth rate in Uttlesford for 2021-22 was also low.

The EHT reported that attendance at both schools had been strong, but signs were beginning to appear of increased un-authorized absences due to families being desperate to get away for short breaks / day trips with the lifting of the Covid-19 restrictions.

A key issue for each school was the increased number of children with special education needs and disability [SEND] and children with Education and Health Care Plans [EHCP]. Each school had higher numbers of SEND children and children with EHCPs than the national averages. This created additional staff costs and funding issues as all schools were required to pay the first £6k for each child with an EHCP and only received the balance of funding from Essex CC. Funding was also paid a term in arrears for SEN top-up funding. A lot of new children joining each school had significant additional education needs that would need to be monitored and supported.

The financial position of each Academy differed in that GCPA had significant reserves that it was using to invest in the infrastructure, premises, and provision of education at the school. DPA had limited reserves and was currently unable to invest in and improve the school to attract new families looking for school places. This had created a degree of frustration as the governors were keen to support school improvement at DPA.

The Business Manager and DPA's F&P Committee had been working together in helping governors better understand the monthly financial reports and the classification and availability of the school's reserves to fund additional projects. In filling the current parent governor vacancy, the governors were keen to appoint a person with financial knowledge to help strengthen the LGB's finance skills and expertise.

Several staff, at GCPA, have lost family members during the pandemic that has

understandably been challenging to staff morale.

The Chair asked if the government had issued any new guidelines to schools with the relaxation of the Covid-19 rules and when schools would be able to return to pre-Covid-19 conditions.

The EHT reported no new guidelines or information had been issued by the government, but she felt it would be likely that schools would be required to maintain pupil and teaching staff “bubbles” for another academic year to prevent any further school closures.

The Chair asked whether the Trust could do more to address what had been lost in areas such as the across-age provision of sport, music, and drama, due to the measures that had been put in place to isolate year groups in “bubbles”.

It was important the Trust knew the likely direction that schools were required to follow to allow it to put in place alternative provision to minimise the effect of future restrictions.

9/21 Finance

a) Financial Reports

The meeting received the financial reports and managements accounts for the 7 months to 31 March 2021 for each Academy and noted the variances between the forecasts and budgets for the year end.

Both Academies were forecast to be within budget at the year end with the forecast for DPA to be £10k better than its budget for the year.

b) ESFA’s School Resource Management Self-Assessment

The meeting received and noted the outcome of the ESFA’s School Resource Management Self-Assessment to help provide trusts assurance that they were meeting the basic standards necessary to achieve a good level of financial health and resource management.

c) Requests for expenditure that exceed the EHT approval limit

The EHT reported that following the decision of DPA’s Year 5/6 teacher to retire at the end of the academic year there would be no senior teaching staff at the school. The Head of School proposed to create a Senior Leadership Team [SLT], including lead teachers for KS1 and KS2 and himself. This would be achieved by creating two new Teaching and Learning Responsibility [TLRs] posts and payments for existing classroom teachers who would have extra leadership responsibilities. This would cost in the region of £1,000 per post (KS1 and KS2).

It was **agreed** to fund the creation of the two new TLR posts for two years from the Trust’s School Improvement Fund with the specific focus on school improvement.

EHT

10/21 Personnel

a) Pay Policy

The EHT introduced the new draft Pay Policy and highlighted the areas that needed to be considered and agreed at the meeting.

It was **agreed** to approve the Pay policy subject to the following amendments:

- Pay increases should be made by reference to National Pay awards and not inflation.
- The Trust’s pay policy/increases should be reviewed annually.
- Individual staff appeals against pay awards should be heard and considered by the Staff Grievance Committee.
- Staff time for training carried outside school hours would not be

recompensed.

- Recruitment and retention payments should not be included.

b) **Appointment of Staff**

[Included in the EHT's Report]

c) **External advice on personnel and human resource issues**

It was **agreed** to defer agreeing the arrangements for the provision of external advice on personnel and human resource issues to a future meeting.

d) **Staff performance management reviews**

[Included in the EHT's Report]

ROUTINE BUSINESS

11/21 Chair's Action

No urgent action had been taken by the Chair or Vice-Chair since the last meeting.

12/21 Safeguarding

Liam Tobin, the Director designated to monitor the management and implementation of safeguarding regulations at each Academy, reported no safeguarding issues had arisen at either Academy since the last meeting.

The meeting noted that Jo Hancock, who had been recently appointed onto the GCPA LGB, was currently being inducted to allow her to fulfil her governor safeguarding role and responsibilities.

13/21 Health and Safety

Gary Benn, the Director responsible for ensuring each Academy was meeting its Health and Safety statutory responsibilities reported the external Health and Safety Advisor had recently visited GCPA and had reported that everything was in order. She planned to visit DPA shortly.

The new Safesmart compliance software to record and manage Health and Safety systems and procedures was being well used at each school and provided staff training on Health and Safety.

14/21 Correspondence

No correspondence for the attention of the Directors had been received since the last meeting.

15/21 Minutes/reports of committees

The meeting received and noted the confirmed minutes of the meeting of the GCPA LGB held on 23 April 2021, the meeting of the DPA LGB held on 25 April 2021 and the Audit Committee meeting held on 21 January 2021.

16/21 Any other business

None.

17/21 Date/time of future meetings

Thursday 15/07/2021 at 19:45 hrs

Approved by the Board of Directors on 15 July 2021