

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE WHITE ROSE ACADEMIES TRUST (WRAT) BOARD
OF DIRECTORS HELD VIRTUALLY ON THURSDAY 3 MARCH 2022, COMMENCING AT
5.30PM**

Present: Caroline Gruen, Annie McMaster, Kate Pearlman-Shaw (Interim Chair), David Strachan, Craig Williams and Andrew Whittaker.

In attendance: Sam Bradley, Trust Business Director (TBD) (to Minute 21/22.), Andrea Cowans, Director of Student Life, LEG (DSL) (for Minute 21/11.18)), Stuart Jolley, Chief Financial Officer (CFO), Pete Quinn (Consultant) (for Minute 21/11.18)), Sharon West (Interim Clerk) and Christian Wilcocks, Executive Principal (EP).

21/22.17 Apologies and Welcome

a. Apologies for absence and welcome

The Interim Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Interim Clerk to the Board. Apologies for absence were received from Colin Booth, Helena Phillips and Margaret Parkes.

b. Declarations of Interest

The Interim Chair declared an interest as she was currently providing training support for some staff groups within the Luminare Education Group.

21/22.18 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Review

The DSL explained that the Trust had commissioned Peter Quinn Consulting to conduct a 'deep dive' into EDI. Mr Quinn recorded his thanks to Rajinder Soor and Alicia Manners for their support with the review.

Mr Quinn gave a brief presentation on his review and proposed some future objectives for the Board and Executive Team to consider.

The Board thanked Mr Quinn for his presentation and report which had been very useful. Directors were pleased to see that there was a lot of activity going on within the Academies and that practice and experience was being shared. They wanted to be clear about what it meant to 'become and communities' and what this meant. They asked how the Trust could get to a position where it recognised that everyone was different and was meeting individual needs. They acknowledged that there would need to be a balance achieved in terms of getting this right.

Mr Quinn explained that the Trust was trying to be Leeds and reflect the Leeds community. This was a predominantly white working-class community. The Trust was on the right type of journey. There were great examples of inclusivity and aspiration creation/raising. The Board accepted that culture was very important.

The Board sought clarification on the term 'allyship' in relation to itself. Mr Quinn explained that given the composition of the Board it might not have the same 'lived experience' but Directors could be allies by understanding the

Trust's communities and recognising contributions.

Mr Quinn said that he was very happy for Directors to email him with any questions following the meeting.

The Board recognised that the report provided assurance on where the Trust was on its journey. It wholeheartedly supported recognising and thanking individuals for unpaid discretionary efforts. The Board discussed the Arbor system and the need to ensure that it was being used to reflect the statutory protected characteristics. It recognised that there were some legacy issues which meant that some data was not actively being collected.

The CEO informed the Board that the Executive Team had discussed how to give staff access so that they could record information themselves.

The Board agreed that proposed objectives 1-12 would sit with the Executive Team and objectives 13-14 with the Board. The Board asked that the Clerk to the Board include objective 14 in the Governance Development and Action Plan that was being developed.

Action: Clerk to the Board to include objective 14 in the Governance Development and Action Plan.

The EP outlined some pieces of work that were being piloted by Alicia Manners. The Board requested that regular updates on progress be presented to them.

Action: Regular updates on EDI pilot projects to presented to the Board.

The Board and the Executive recorded its thanks to Mr Quinn for the review.

The DSL and Mr Quinn left the meeting.

21/22.19

INTERIM CHAIR

The Interim Chair explained that the Chair had opted to step back because of potential conflicts of interest and the investigation into ongoing concerns. The Board recognised the exceptional level of work that the Chair had been undertaking for some time and recorded their thanks for her efforts. Mr Booth had also decided to step back while the Board commissioned investigation was being completed. The Interim Chair had agreed to take on the role in the short term until the conclusion of the investigation. Her availability would be limited because of her existing work commitments.

The Interim Chair referenced the Board commissioned investigation that was about to commence. She explained that serious concerns had been raised that could not be discussed in this open forum as this could prejudice the investigation. In the meantime she encouraged the Board to focus on business as usual as there were decisions to be taken.

21/22.20 Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 and matters arising**a. Minutes of the Board meeting held on 9 December 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 December 2021 were approved as an accurate record for signing by the Chair.

b. Matters arising**i. Summary of matters arising from previous meetings**

The Board reviewed the summary of matters arising and noted the commentary on progress.

The Board was advised that further work was being done in terms of developing a trust-wide focus on personal development. The CFO would be taking a proposal to the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee on incorporating a heat map in future risk registers. Engagement with key stakeholders would be covered under the strategy item later on the agenda. An additional training day had been considered as part of the staff wellbeing programme, but this had not taken place and alternative plans were being investigated.

The EDI review had been completed and had been discussed earlier in the meeting. The Board workplan had been put on hold until a new permanent Clerk was appointed. The options for performance related pay had been deferred until the current investigation was concluded. The CEO's appraisal targets had been completed so this item could be removed from the list. The CFO contract appeared as an item of business later on the agenda.

ii. Any other matters arising

The Board noted that a new Chair was required for the Audit, Risk and Finance Committee, but acknowledged that this depended upon wider Trust Member recruitment.

The Board queried the inclusion of the Primary Academy's Relationships, Sex and Health Policy in the meeting pack. The policy had been included in error. The Chair of the Alder Tree Primary Academy (ATPA) said she had some concerns regarding the policy and would raise these with the Executive Principal outside of the meeting.

STRATEGY AND IMPLEMENTATION**21/22.21 Progress with Strategic Plan and Vision/ESFA Update**

The Interim Chair informed the Board that the ESFA had advised that the pathfinder was no longer on the agenda. Luminare Education Group was unhappy about the decision and intended to appeal it.

The Board was advised that notification had been received from the ESFA that the Trust was non-compliant on a couple of issues. ESFA had asked for

an action plan. Non-Executive Directors of the Board had met on 15 February 2022 and had prepared an action plan which had been submitted and accepted by the ESFA. Regular touch base meetings would take place between the Trust and the ESFA to review progress against the action plan. The next meeting was due to take place on 10 March.

The Board requested that the Minutes of the meeting on 15 February and action plan be circulated to all Non-Executive Directors.

Action: Clerk to the Board to circulate the Minutes and the action plan.

The CEO reported that two letters on this matter had been received from the ESFA, and a third letter relating to Mabgate. It was agreed that these letters should be circulated to Non-Executive Directors along with the Minutes and action plan.

Action: Clerk to the Board to circulate the letters from the ESFA.

The CEO informed the Board that over the past two weeks meetings had been held with the Internal Auditors, External Auditors, Regional Schools Commissioner (RSC) team and ESFA officials. The aim of the meetings with the auditors was to seek a professional view on the conduct of the Trust and governance issues. The RSC and ESFA had reminded the Trust of their regulatory powers. Independent legal advice had been sought to support the commissioning of an independent investigation following recent reported concerns, in addition Browne Jacobson the commissioned solicitors, were currently advising on the CFO role which would be shared with the Board.

The Board acknowledged the additional time commitments being placed on the Interim Chair. There was some concern about appointing legal advisers, especially because of the costs involved and the resources that were being taken up and not therefore being dedicated to students and staff. Directors were clear that the Board would need to take a number of decisions at the conclusion of the investigation.

The Board agreed that the RSC and ESFA were right to bring their regulatory powers to the attention of the Trust and discussed the possible implications of any action that might be taken.

The CEO apologised that as a result of the situation it would be necessary to extend the timeline for developing the strategic plan and vision. The Board agreed that attention needed to be focused on the current situation and that the strategic plan and vision should be deferred until the conclusion of the investigation and subsequent action.

Action: Development of the Strategic Plan and Vision to be deferred until the conclusion of the investigation and subsequent action.

21/22.22

Governance Link Director Report

The Board was informed that the previous Clerk to the Board was providing

some continuing support to the Board and was working on a Governance Development and Action Plan. This would include a Governance Handbook and arrangements for Link Director reporting. The Board agreed that the Schemes of Delegations should be put on hold until the conclusion of the current investigation.

Action: Schemes of Delegations to be put on hold until the conclusion of the investigation.

21/22.23

UTC Update

The CEO provided an update on negotiations. The Trust had stressed that it would require a strong financial support package if it was to take on the sponsorship of the UTC. The UTC had been honest in that a great deal of investment would be required as all of its equipment would need to be updated or replaced. For the UTC to be viable it would need student numbers of 500+. It was currently unviable and therefore not in a position to invest in terms of capital replacement.

Members of the Executive had been sending in individuals from their staff teams to work and provide support for the UTC, which represented a significant investment of time and resources on the part of the Trust. It had emphasised the importance of putting in realistic projections. The UTC had subsequently taken the decision to suspend sponsorship discussions. The Board agreed that the Trust should not be financially disadvantaged for having acted in good faith.

The Board acknowledged that there were material concerns about ongoing negotiations and was clear that the position of the Trust should not be compromised. It therefore agreed that the Trust should walk away from the negotiations. The CEO requested leeway to conclude the next phase. The Board supported this approach but stressed that the Trust would require material assurance and a substantial financial support package if it were to continue down the sponsorship route.

The CEO agreed to report back to the next meeting.

Action: CEO to report to the meeting on 28 April 2022 on the sponsorship negotiations.

EXECUTIVE, OPERATIONAL AND COMMUNICATION UPDATES

21/22.24

Executive Principal's Report

The Executive Principal presented his report and highlighted that two decisions were required to be made by the Board.

The Board was pleased to note that there had been an upturn in attendance in terms of students and staff.

The Board discussed behaviour and the number of fixed term exclusions. The

trend appeared to be increasing and Directors asked if there was a particular reason for this. The CEO explained that the increase reflected the greater number of students in the Academies post lockdowns this academic year. There had been several significant incidents which had required a strong response. Conversations had been had with students and parents on the expectations of the Trust. A lot of work had also been done with communities and agencies on inclusivity. The Executive Principal added that students had become used to working in small bubbles over the past two years and some were finding the transition of returning to larger groups difficult. He highlighted that as a proportion of the cohort numbers of exclusions were actually down on the previous year because of the greater learner numbers.

The Board acknowledge that although ATPA was doing well, it was not complacent and was conscious that there was still an issue around attendance which continued to be worked on. Directors asked that comparative information across the Academies be provided in future reports.

Action: Executive Principal to include comparative information across the Academies in future reports.

The Board was notified that the Police had been issuing an increasing number of injunctions to 11-18 year olds. There was a concern about socialisation and links to violent crime. The Board acknowledged that there were challenges around re-engagement with education across the city and the country.

The Board recognised that outcomes were not comparable or calibrated because of circumstances. Directors asked where this could lead in the short and medium term. They were advised that the Academies were focusing on levelling up and providing reassurance for students. The Board was very supportive of this approach and stressed the importance of enabling students to achieve to the best of their ability.

The Board discussed the focus for support from the Academy Improvement Partner (AIP) and agreed that a pragmatic approach should be adopted which made the best use of the time available. The Board agreed that a review of commissioning arrangements for alternative provision would be beneficial. A suggestion was put forward that the AIP look at duplication of work at Academy and Trust level.

Resolved: to approve this proposed AIP workstream, and additional items, to be completed during the forthcoming term (March 1st to April 1st).

The Board was asked if ATPA could decline to be a polling station for the forthcoming election because of the impact this would have on attendance and learning. The Board agreed that ATPA should try. The Chair of Leeds West Academy agreed to write in her role as a local Councillor.

Action: ATPA to approach Leeds City Council about finding an alternative location for the polling station on 5 May 2022.

The Board acknowledged that the SAFE guidelines had real potential going forward. They noted that the Trust had been involved in the early work on the guidelines.

The Board formally recorded its thanks to the Executive Principal for his contribution to the work of the Trust, wished him well in his new appointment and said that he would be missed.

21/22.25 LWA Expansion Update

The Trust Business Director (TBD) reported that plans and proposals were underway. The Board was pleased to note that the Academy had received the 'green light' for the sports pitch. Although there had been a 7-week delay, work was on target to complete before the September term.

21/22.26 AIP Reports

The Board reviewed the reports from the AIP. They concluded that the reports were helpful and very thorough and noted that the Executive Principal tracked all of the recommendations with the Academy Principals.

The Board queried whether there was an issue about less experienced teachers achieving the desired level. The Executive Principal explained that newly qualified teachers had not had the opportunity to gain the same level of experience due to Covid. The Trust was working to support early career teachers and effective coaching mechanisms were in place.

The Board asked how the teaching of religious education was covered in "drop down" days. The Board was assured that the Trust was fulfilling the requirements of the national curriculum. Directors agreed that it would be worthwhile to conduct a review to ensure that this was the case.

The Board fully supported the recommendations put forward by the AIP.

21/22.27 Alternative Provision Annual Report

The Board was advised that there were some concerns arising from quality assurance visits around safeguarding and quality of education. The Executive Principal would be reviewing these with the Commissioning Panel in due course.

The Board recorded its thanks to the Trust Vice Principal.

The Board was made aware that ATPA also used alternative provision and asked that this be reflected in future reports.

The Board received assurance that all new providers would be registered. Directors emphasised the Trust's responsibility to ensure that it did the best for its students and owed them a duty of care.

Action: ATPA use of alternative provision to be included in future reports.

21/22.28 LCA PAN Increase Proposal

The TBD outlined the proposal.

Resolved: To support the LCA PAN increase proposal.

21/22.29 Contract Extension for Cleaning and Catering Services

The TBD outlined the proposal.

Resolved: To approve the proposal to extend both the cleaning and catering service contracts to run until July 2023.

Given the lateness of the hour the Board agreed to convene an additional meeting to cover the business in sections 6, 7 and 8 of the agenda. Officers, with the exception of the CEO, withdrew from the meeting.

Action: additional meeting to be convened to cover the business in sections 6, 7 and 8 of the agenda.

CLOSED SESSION

21/22.30 **A closed session took place which was minuted seperately.**