

DRAFT MINUTES
GREAT HEIGHTS ACADEMY TRUST
MAT BOARD OF TRUSTEES MEETING

Monday 20th May 2024 (5.00 p.m.)

Present: A Bennett OBE (CEO) C Midgley (Chair of Trustees)
J Power I Jaffar
J Midgley K Inwood
J Nellis (Vice Chair) – **zoom**

In attendance: N Oliver (Governance professional)
J Firth (COO), A Rawson (CFO)
Director of School Improvement, D Worthington
Director of Governance, A Midgley

1. Apologies – None.

2. Declaration of Interests

The CEO (A Bennett) had declared to Standards Committee that her daughter is marking AQA Geography papers. C Midgley (Chair of Trustees) reiterated his family relationship to J Midgley (Chair of Finance and Premises) & A Midgley (Director of Governance).

3. Opening remarks and governance update

Reports had been circulated in advance (uploaded to Trello for the final time and also directly accessible from embedded links in the agenda) and were also accompanied by RID (Risks, Issues, Decisions) summaries for all areas to ease reading by Trustees.


The Board were provided with a verbal update on Trustee recruitment. The Chair of Trustees and CEO have been working in the background on a twin track approach - with two recommendations received from a Trustee and an Officer and two, possibly three, from Governors for Schools. Application forms and interviews to be followed through, with the aim of identifying three quality appointments (DfE Regions Group keen for all the vacancies to be filled asap, with the Trust website updated accordingly - see correspondence).

The Board agreed unanimously to a proposal from the Chair of Trustees to recommend Illy Jaffar & James Power to Trust Members for re-appointment as Trustees, for a further four year period, w.e.f. June 2024.

Trustees reaffirmed the decision of 18th March 2024 that the good practice roles of Safeguarding Trustee (formerly A Birt) and HSE Trustee (J Fryer) should be filled as soon as Trustee replacements are in post. In the meantime, in response to the Chair, J Midgley agreed to continue providing a link between MAT Board and the Colne Valley HS Interim LGB re. any continuing safeguarding concerns.

The Board agreed to a proposal from the Chair of Trustees that the External Review of Governance and the LGB Self Review should both be deferred until 2025 in view of ongoing change at the Trust. The CEO noted that Governors for Schools now have an advisor on board who would be suitable for governance reviews.

Trustees were reminded that Trello is now a read-only archive (from May 20th). The Director of Governance provided a verbal update on the new Trust-wide arrangement: one central Teams platform. Target timescales are: MAT Board (15th July meeting); all primary

 15/07/24

LGBs this year; others to follow. At the suggestion of I Jaffar it was agreed to review the security of Teams v. Sharepoint. Any two-factor authentication (2FA) issues to be resolved outside the meeting, via an IT Support Ticket in the first instance.

4. Minutes of 18th March 2024

5. Matters Arising

The draft minutes were agreed.

I Jaffar was thanked for providing a crisis plan template, which the Trust's new Marketing & Communications Manager (India Bagley) would be reviewing.

6. Correspondence, including ESFA

DfE Regions Group meeting (8th April; follow-up letter received 17th April): the Chair of Trustees provided a verbal summary of the key points raised: holding the Trust's Executive to account; CVHS & Nields, "a rapid turnaround helps in securing the next stage of growth"; the role of GHAT 'hubs' in improving the Trust's own schools; attendance (PA of disadvantaged pupils).

DfE School Condition Allocation £563,572 (14th May): the COO (J Firth) added that an Estates Review has been commissioned, including how to score and prioritise distribution of the SCA across the Trust's schools. In response to questions it was confirmed that School Condition Allocation is capital funding for MATs with more than five Academies and 3000 students, replacing the need for CIF bids but with similar stipulations around poor condition / H&S improvements. Additional funding is expected in future years with CVHS factored in, but - as a PFI school - not in direct proportion to the school's size. Additional funding avenues were discussed (reserves; sustainability and green projects; RPA etc), together with the wider implications: Horizon Planning, Deputy COO role and Digital Infrastructure needs.

7.1 MAT reporting – CEO (A Bennett)

The CEO Report, linked items, running records, statutory reporting and Academy Dashboards (Item 7.2; updated May 2024) were taken as read, with discussion centred around the CEO's RID Report. Current high-level risks were noted: **CVHS vulnerability** (Interim LGB in place, together with increased scrutiny from Standards Committee) and **Attendance/PA** (bespoke planning underpinned by Kirklees Working Party and EEF key guidance on knowing your communities).

The CEO, COO and Officers updated Trustees on significant changes surrounding attendance and DfE's expectations (DW is attending the Kirklees WP - which has a DfE advisor assigned - to pair with other Trusts, ensuring the widest possible 'community' approach). The Chair of Standards updated MAT Board on two additional Standards Committee meetings to discuss CVHS, then Nields & Marsden Juniors (the combined/co-chaired Standards and Finance meeting having been cancelled). Standards Committee were now of the understanding that CVHS was moving at a good pace with reports of "green shoots" in all areas. Both Nields and Marsden Juniors are going according to plan, with no further action required at present.

The CEO added that secondary recruitment was a HR priority to resolve, with the Trust's digital infrastructure also an area of risk needing a more strategic approach (A Midgley and J Christian to support the COO going forwards).

The Director of Governance (A Midgley) had no LGB issues to report.

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Director of Governance Report: Draft LGB & Board Plan 2024-25

The Director of Governance reported that GHAT has successfully reduced to five MAT Board meetings across the year, whilst maintaining 6 LGB meetings. The 2023 Academy Trust Handbook makes it clear that Trusts need to report appropriately on standards and finance, but has removed the threshold for six meetings - Board meetings **must** take place at least three times a year. Following discussions with the Core Team, the proposal is now to move to a cycle of four LGB / Trust Board meetings - to maximise high quality reporting focusing on impact on all occasions. The Chair of Trustees endorsed the proposal, mindful of the demands on Trustees (which DfE has confirmed is impacting on recruitment nationally) but that it would be reliant on 'live' elements of the Trust's new reporting platform and that extraordinary meetings would still be available, as required.

Comments were heard from all the other Trustees present, as follows:

- concerns around holding the Executive to account with fewer meetings
- how to embed the strategic ambition and direction
- striking a balance between more strategic meetings and evidencing for Ofsted, H&S etc
- "business as usual" information should be fully 'live' in the background (evolving the Academy Dashboards as part of the new digital infrastructure)
- the new approach should be filtered down to local school level

Trustees were reassured that there would be more impactful reporting, but agreed that: **A revised proposal to be available by the 15th July MAT Board meeting; to include optional additional strategy and showcase days (run independently / not part of the reportable structure) - for Trustees, LGBs, Principals, Marketing & Comms etc.**

7.3 Finance and Operations

Management Accounts for Period 7 (March 2024) were received and considered by the Trust Board, to ensure compliance and oversight of the Trust's financial position in accordance with the Academy Trust Handbook:

	Current report as at 31.3.24	Previously reported as at 28.2.24	Variance
Brought forward	£ 4,521,830	£ 4,138,168	+ £383,662
Total Trust income	£31,139,847	£30,843,565	+ £296,282
Total Trust exp	£31,435,388	£30,924,097	+ £511,301
In-year	- £295,541 deficit	- £80,522 deficit	+ £215,019
End of year forecast	£ 4,226,289	£ 4,057,646	+ £168,643

The Trust's collective end of year forecast £4,226,289 was approved. This is 13.6% of reserves as a %age of income - a healthy position (20% or above would trigger ESFA).

The accompanying CFO (A Rawson) report was received and noted, to meet Trust Quality Description expectations; providing context, variance comments, pupil number updates and budget planning assumptions. The CFO's 'RID' report outlined three interconnected risks:

- **GAG & Budget planning:** GHAT will likely be reporting an in-year deficit for 2024/25, mitigated by current healthy reserves
- **Falling rolls:** likely that some restructuring will be needed
- **'Known unknowns':** GAG increasing; Teachers' pension & pay grants continuing; pay award estimates (support staff now offered 2.5% to 5.77%); national political updates.

Trustees were alerted that a concerning development since the CFO Report was circulated is a significant increase in the in-year deficit at The MFG Academy. The proposed position

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is not acceptable and discussions to achieve a more secure budget are ongoing, including with the LGB Chair (J Nellis). In response to a question it was confirmed that there are no implications for the other former MFG Trust schools, CVHS and Marsden Juniors.

The COO Report and COO Workforce Report were taken as read, having been received by Standards Committee earlier in the evening.

7.4 Trust policies, updates and approvals

GAG Pooling: The CFO has been investigating GAG pooling approaches, proposed to be implemented for academic year 2024/25. A draft 'One Trust Finance Policy' (CFO Doc 3) has been produced for Trustee consideration and approval. It was agreed that the draft will be rolled out to Heads in July, prior to finalising at Trust Board in July. **Trustees were invited to send any feedback/thoughts during the intervening period.**

Internal control: Following discussion with the CEO and Chair of Finance & Premises Committee, a suggested RAG rating will be applied when seeking approvals in between Board / Committee meetings, as follows (full criteria set out in the CFO Report): Light Focus Review; Medium Focus Review; High Focus Review. This RAG rating approach is to provide guidance to Trustees as to how much 'risk' or 'focus' is associated with any requests. Trustees received the Termly 'Approvals Between Meetings' (CFO Doc 6) which had been RAG-rated using this approach. **Feedback is requested from Trustees as to whether this is helpful.**

Trustees had received a summary of financial approvals required:

Catering SLA to reflect increase/meal (CH £83,252 pa); Budget software re GAG pooling (GHAT/all academies £69,736 for three years); IT Hardware (CVHS £384,737.63); Printers (CVHS, MFG £107,766 – final proposal to be sent to Trustees for approval post meeting). **All items were approved as documented.**

8 AOB – None

9 Standing Item - MAT Board decisions & Next Steps

Minutes of previous meeting 18.3.24 – **approved**

Re-appointment of I Jaffar & J Power – **recommended for final approval by Members**
Trust Management Accounts 2023-24 Period 7 – **received, discussed and approved**
Financial Approvals – **agreed, as at Item 7.4**

One Trust Finance Policy – **to be shared with Heads, prior to final approval in July**
Approvals in between meetings – **to note the RAG-ratings**

LGB and Trust Board Dates 2024-25 – **for further discussion in July**

A number of items were agreed for the CEO to update Trustees between meetings:

- 1) Revised proposal for 2024-25 meetings, events and dates
- 2) April 2024 Management Accounts to circulate and MFG updated finance positioning
- 3) Attendance Working Party update
- 4) CVHS (IEB) progress reporting
- 5) Secondary teaching vacancies update
- 6) Digital Infrastructure review outcomes

10 Future Meetings (Riverside Mills)

15th July 2024

F&P Committee / MAT Board

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