

Minutes of the Esteem Multi-Academy Trust Annual General Meeting
Wednesday 4th December 2024
Newstead Room, Esteem Central Offices at 6.00pm with Teams Dial In

In Attendance	Role
Katherine Robertson (KR) née Soanes	Member (Chair of AGM Meeting)
Bernadette Hunter (BH)	Member (Dialled In)
Mark Phillips (MP)	Member
Greg Longley (GL)	Member (Dialled In)
Ian Coker (IC)	Member
Mark Emly (ME)	Trustee (Chair of Trustees)
Martin Finch (MF)	Trustee
Dawn Butler (DB)	Trustee
Craig Kennady (CK)	Trustee
Pauline Melvin-Anderson (PMA)	Trustee
Warren Porter (WP)	Trustee
Julian Scholefield (JS)	CEO
Karen Hayes (KH)	Director of Partnerships and Provision
Clive Lawrence (CL)	Chief Education Officer
Charlotte Brown (CB)	Management Accountant
Hannah Jones (HL)	Hart Shaw LLP
Rebecca Bage (RB)	Governance Manager and Clerk
Apologies Received	Role
Paul Ryan (PR)	Trustee
Jackie Bull (JB)	Trustee
David Smith (DS)	Finance Director

Quorate

01-12/2024 Welcome and Introductions

KR welcomed attendees and led introductions. **RB confirmed** that the meeting was convened in accordance with EMAT articles. She provided a reminder to members on their role in holding the trust board to account and provided clarification on the requirements of an AGM, directing questions and maintaining a strategic focus.

02-12/2024 Apologies for Absence / Declaration of Interest

Apologies received from PR, JB and DS **were accepted**. There were no potential conflicts of interest declared in the agenda items to be considered. Attendees confirmed that there were no changes to report from the previously completed declaration of interest forms.

03-12/2024 Approval of Member's Meeting Minutes / Matters Arising

The minutes from the members meeting held on 17th July 2024 were unanimously **agreed as a true and accurate record** subject to name change amendment.

Matters arising - MP asked if the auditors had been made aware of WP's employment-related interest and RB assured that DS had communicated with the auditors on this, that this was logged, and that no concerns had been raised.

04-12/2024 Agree Items of Any Other Business

No items of AOB were requested.

05-12/2024 CEO Update

5.1 Trust Achievements 2023-2024

JS reported that it had been a positive year overall for the Trust and went on to position areas of focus and priority. He highlighted successes and reflected on some challenges that had arisen that continue to be addressed.

Trust Growth

JS reflected that since the last AGM the Trust had grown from 12 to 14 schools. This was due to Bracken Hill School and the Aspire Academy joining Esteem. **JS appraised** of the positive feedback from leaders and governors at the schools and the successful transition and alignment of the schools i.e. academisation for Bracken Hill School and the movement from being a single academy trust (SAT) to joining a multi academy trust (MAT) for Aspire Academy.

JS commented on internal growth and the impact on our schools and alternative provisions with regards to a significant increase in pupil numbers. Context was provided on this and **JS advised** of work and planning that was ongoing with regards to expected future growth.

Capital Projects

JS provided an update of major capital projects within the Trust and the development and/or expansion of some of the schools. This included a progress update on projects impacting positively on x4 of the Esteem special schools and the alternative provisions. **JS reflected** on progress being made, explained the ways the projects are being funded and the significant contributions from local authorities. **He said** as with all major projects challenges sometimes arose but these had been well managed, and progress is being made that will positively impact upon our pupils, staff and the communities that our schools serve.

Ofsted

JS appraised of what inspections had taken place during the year and outcomes. This had included the following;

Elmsleigh Nursery and Infant School - the Trust's only mainstream school had been inspected in October 2024 and had received a good outcome in all areas.

Derby Pride Academy (DPA) - had been inspected in October 2024 and had retained its outstanding rating.

JS discussed with members the types and frequency of inspection. Trustees in attendance and operational leads commented on the support provided by the EMAT central team to schools and the positive feedback received. Reflections were shared with regards to the approach taken when preparing for inspection and how the school's take the lead during an inspection with support in hand should it be required.

ME appraised of involvement of trustees and governors during the inspection process and reflected on his own experience. He expressed thanks to all those involved in a governance role who had met with inspectors and commented on the reporting back from inspections from a strategic context.

Work that Underpins Our Successes

JS gave a comprehensive overview of the development and implementation of the Education Development and Improvement Framework (EDIF). He reported that the framework has been positively received, offering schools a more tailored and responsive support package. It makes effective use of data and ensures alignment with the Trust's existing capacity. JS also outlined the Full Academy Review (FAR) and themed academy review processes, providing context and clarity around their purpose and structure.

JS outlined the approach taken when schools face challenges, highlighting the strategic use of resources through a 'Team Around the Academy' model. He shared a current example where this approach is being effectively applied to support a school requiring a higher level of intervention, demonstrating the framework's flexibility and impact.

JS advised that the whole trust theme for this year is attendance and JS and ME explained how operationally and strategically there is focus through the lens of attendance.

External review of governance

JS shared the key findings from a recent governance review conducted by Academy Ambassadors. The report, which was well received by trustees, provided strong external validation, confirming that the Trust's governance arrangements offer substantial assurance and effectively safeguard the organisation. It also highlighted the efficient and effective working relationships across the governance structure, as well as the high standard of financial reporting. Members extended their thanks to RB and DS for their leadership in governance and finance, and offered their congratulations on achieving such a positive external evaluation.

Financial Position

Funding Challenges and Pupil Numbers - JS provided an overview of ongoing funding challenges and increasing pupil numbers. He emphasised the importance of remaining responsive to changes in SEND and alternative provision funding and outlined the mechanisms in place to monitor and manage these variations. He highlighted the Trust's robust financial processes and the importance of data-informed decision-making. **JS reflected** on recent discussions with local authorities, noting the importance of maintaining a balanced approach and applying appropriate challenge where necessary.

Alignment of Operations and Systems Development

JS spoke about the continued effort to align school-level autonomy with wider operational consistency across the Trust. He shared updates on progress in systems development, particularly in data management and operational practices, which are being enhanced through resource sharing and collaboration. The rollout of Arbor across the Trust, alongside the implementation of EveryHR and MyNewTerm, was noted as a positive step. These investments

are driving efficiencies and delivering improvements for staff. **JS also reported** that a review of the Trust's HR service structure is currently underway.

Central Team Operations

JS updated members on a renewed focus on central team operations. He explained the rationale behind this focus and summarised key discussion points. A recent central team development day was held to explore priorities, and **JS provided** a brief overview of the event's agenda and outcomes.

Leadership Capacity

JS outlined recent changes to the central team, including an expansion of the expert team and the move toward an executive headteacher and school business manager model. He shared the positive impact of this structure on leadership capacity and operational effectiveness across the Trust.

Collaboration with Other Trusts

JS advised on ongoing collaborative work with other trusts. These partnerships are aimed at strengthening practice and sharing expertise across the sector.

Free School Applications

JS reflected on the free school applications submitted throughout the year, highlighting the Trust's proactive approach in encouraging applications from mainstream providers. This strategic direction and its implications were discussed.

5.2 Priorities for the Year Ahead

JS advised of the priorities and focus going forward. He highlighted the need to carry on doing what is working well and to ensure ambitions are achieved. **JS reflected** that the focus on growth and reiterated points of focus discussed. Ensuring SEND remains a key priority for mainstream schools was discussed and views shared.

Q. You have talked a lot about a lot of things and the focus and achievements of the Trust is encouraging. Is there an IT strategy in place?

A. (JS) Yes, we have a plan in place for digital transformation and we are engaged with TransforMATive. **(KH)** We have lots of alignment but in terms of infrastructure we are not 'one' and our focus is on this.

Q. The external review of governance feedback and results is great to hear. Will you share the actions and findings with members?

A. (JS) Yes, these will be circulated.

KR thanked JS on behalf of members for his update and acknowledged the ongoing hard work and positive impact of the Trust on the pupils and communities that it serves.

06-12/2024 EMAT Finance

6.1 Presentation of Audited Accounts

RB advised that the following documents which had been circulated ahead of the meeting;

'EMAT AGM Notice'

'Accounts for the year ended 31 August 2024'

'Communication Report'

'Letter of Representation'

'Regulatory Letter of Representation'

Financial Statements

HJ confirmed with trustees that they had received and considered the EMAT audited accounts and related documents. The Accounts for the year ending 31st August 2024 were positioned and the document was shared on screen. **HJ guided** attendees through each page and drew attention to the following key areas:

Page 1 and 2 – no queries raised with regards the information detailed and brief review of each section.

Pages 3 to 16 - Trustees report explained and confirmation that all required sections included. Figures on page 12, key numbers and carry forward detail highlighted. Carried forward position was set out. **HJ commented** that the in-year surplus figure was the best one seen this year and that the Trust was in a very strong financial position.

Page 17 to 22 – Governance statement highlighted and key elements positioned. Statement of compliance talked through.

Page 24 – Trustees made aware of their responsibilities with regards to the accounts

Page 25 to 28 - Going concern section explained. Trustees noted the accounts state ***‘Based on the work we have performed, we have not identified any material uncertainties relating to events or conditions that, individually or collectively, may cast significant doubt on the academy trust’s ability to continue as a going concern for a period of at least twelve months from when the financial statements are authorised for issue.’***

HJ talked through the independent auditor’s report and responsibilities of trustees as detailed on page 26.

Systems of internal control and statement of regularity and compliance positioned and talked through. **HJ advised** that it was a clean report with nothing of significance to report. **HJ positioned** the assurance report on page 29 confirming that the auditors have not identified any issues. She advised that whilst recommendations had been raised these were not significant enough to go into the assurance report.

HJ talked through the key figures of the table on page 31 then went onto the balance sheet on page 33. She reminded trustees that this was a snapshot as at 31 August 2024 and context was provided. She read through the key figures and explained that from an audit point of view Esteem had proven as a Trust to be very astute and forward thinking with regards to investments and that the trust is financially sound. She reflected that the accounts were amongst the best seen for similar organisations and that this was a reflection on the Trust and the finance team.

HJ positioned the remainder of the document and highlighted the numbers and wording in relation to Related Party Transactions on page 61 and Bracken Hill School on page 62.

6.1 Presentation of Audit Management Letter

HJ checked that all attendees were happy with the overview and went onto position the Management Letter. Attention was brought to the appendix 1 and 2 summary. **HJ explained** that due to the very positive nature of the report that there was only minor adjustment. She commended the finance team for the high standard of reports and highlighted the positive position.

Appendix 3 was talked through. **HJ advised** that the point detailed was the same as the previous year but less this year and improving. Attention was drawn to recommendations and advisory points and these were discussed.

Trustees asked;

Q. With regards to the unresolved items, what's the value?

A. Over the value for quotes but I will ask DS to come back to you on the detail on this.

Q. So you feel that there is anything systematic?

A. No, nothing major at all (context provided)

HJ advised that the policy documents that had been referenced had been completed and that the reasons for the delay in updating Director details on Companies House had been noted.

Trustees noted that comment had already been provided on the recommendations by the finance team. The remaining documents/letters were positioned and talked through. **HJ confirmed** that there was assurance of strong systems of control and nothing of concern.

ME thanked HJ for her report and reassurances in relation to the financial health of the Trust. Thanks also extended to the finance team. **KR echoed** ME's thanks and acknowledged how useful her presentation had been to both members and trustees. **KR requested** that a glossary was provided by HJ for next time to aid understanding of acronyms used in the reports.

Trust Board Agreed/Approved:

- ✓ **Trust Board approval of EMAT Annual Report and Accounts for the Year Ending August 2024**
- ✓ **Formal documentation signed-off by Chair of Trust Board and CEO (Accounting Officer)**

Action; HJ to provide glossary next time to aid understanding of acronyms.

07 - 12/2024 Resignation/retirement/election of Trustees or Members

RB confirmed that there were no changes or appointments to consider.

08 - 12/2024 Appointment of Auditors

CB advised that it is expected that DS will be positioning a proposal to members for the re-appointment of Hart Shaw for next year. This is expected to be progressed when the re-tender is due. **RB advised** of the requirements of the Trust Articles with regards to the appointment of auditors and this was noted. Members were supportive of the approach and re-appointment subject to adherence to the requirements of the Articles.

09 – 12/2024 Questions from those in attendance

RB advised that there had been no questions sent to her from members ahead of the meeting. **KR asked** members if they wished to ask any questions and none were raised.

10 – 12/2024 Items of AOB

No items requested.

11 – 12/2024 Date of 2024 Members Meeting / Meeting Close

The date of the next members meeting is **16th July 2025**. **KR brought** the meeting to a close at 19:05 thanking all attendees, on behalf of the members, for their contributions and open discussions and RB for organising and planning the meeting.

Governance Requirement: Minutes signed as true and accurate record by Chair of Members.	
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Signed:	Date: <u>16/07/25</u>
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