Diverse Academies

Minutes of the Diverse Academies Trust Board Meeting
Wednesday 9 July 2025 at 5pm, at Diverse Education Centre, Retford

Quorum Required:3
Trustees Present:9

Trustee name	Initials	A = absence
Mrs M Blore	MB	
Mrs J Mordue	JM	
Mr M Quigley MBE (Chair)	MQ	
Mr J Robertson	JMR	virtual
Mr J Rolph	JR	
Mr D Schwarz	DS	
Mr P Simpson	PS	
Mr I Storey	IS	
Mr R Vizma	RV	

In attendance (staff or other invited persons):

Staff name	Initials	Role	A = Absence
Mr D Cotton	DC	Chief Executive Officer and Accounting Officer	
Mrs J Harrison Hill	JHH	Governance Professional to Board	

Agenda item number	Item	Action by who/when
1. **DAT/149/2425**	**Apologies for absence** There were no apologies for absence. All trustees were in attendance.	
2. **DAT/150/2425**	**Declaration of interest and notification of any changes to declaration made** There were no declarations of interest, either direct or indirect, for any items of business on the agenda. The Chair asked if anyone had any declarations to update. No new declarations of interests were made.	
3. **DAT/151/2425**	**Minutes of the meeting dated Wednesday 14 May 2025 public and confidential.** The minutes of the meeting held 14 May 2025 were agreed and approved by the Chair.	
4. **DAT/152/2425**	**Matters Arising:** ***DAT/100/2425 EDI*** *Action: J Harrison Hill to liaise with Mrs Saxelby for future dates and share with Board.* *The Board were informed that EDI Training is taking place during the November INSET days (26 & 27 November 2025).* The Board were updated that the INSET dates are now allocated for other training, when EDI training is next scheduled, the dates will be communicated to Trustees. This item is now complete.	

	DAT/11/2425 Executive Items ***Confidential item*** **Action:** This item was deemed confidential and was reported in the confidential minutes. Mr Cotton confirmed that the meeting dates would not impact on the decision. This item is now complete. ***DAT/127/2425*** ***Action:*** *Board to formally express gratitude to all staff involved in the smooth transition of opening Yeoman Park Academy.* Mr Schwarz confirmed that a letter had been sent to convey this message. This item is now complete. ***DAT/131/2425 Safeguarding report*** *Child on child sex abuse is written in an ambiguous way and needs clarification to ensure greater clarity to avoid potential misinterpretation.* ***Action****: Mr Cotton to follow up on wording to clarify reporting.* Mr Cotton confirmed that this had been followed up with Mr Knight. This item is now complete. ***DAT/134/2425 Standards and Outcomes Update*** ***Action:*** *Mr Cotton to feedback to Executive Principal and Chief Education Officer on suggestion of trial of BSquared (at Thoresby Vale Academy) to monitor measurement from day one.* Mr Cotton informed Trustees that meetings were being held regarding the curriculum model for Thoresby Vale Academy. This item is now complete.	
5. **DAT/153/2425**	**Confidential item** This item was deemed confidential and was reported in the confidential minutes	
6. **DAT/154/2425**	**External Review of Governance (ERG) /Governor Conference Action Planning** Mr Schwarz informed the Board that, following discussion at the Governance and Partnership committee, it had been agreed for a smaller group comprised of Mr Cotton, Mr Schwarz and Mrs Elway to formulate an action plan to bring to the Board in early Autmn term for further discussion. The action plan will aim to bring together further work undertaken on prioritising the recommendations, and the discussion from the governance conference. **Trustees agreed** this approach to the proposed action plan. Mr Schwarz informed the board that there had been positive feedback received regarding the governance conference held in July. A discussion was held on when Local Academy Committees would see the action plan and update on the external governance review. **Action:** It was agreed that Mr Schwarz would inform the LACs on action being taken following the ERG.	**D Schwarz**
7. **DAT/155/2425**	**LAC/sub-committee Chair terms of office** Mr Schwarz outlined the current terms of office for Chairs as set out in the Scheme of Delegation. This was last updated in January 2021. The update introduced a restriction limiting Chairs of the Board and Committees to a single four-year term. This change has led to the expiry of several LAC Chairs terms, including that of the Board subcommittee Chairs, without suitable successors in place.	

DAT/156/2425 DAT/157/2425	Discussion had been held in this matter at the Governance and Partnership Committee, with a proposal to Board to waive the rule of not exceeding 4 years. Allowing an extension period of one year whilst the scheme of delegation is reviewed to consider if the term limit remains appropriate. Trustees discussed the challenges of succession planning, including difficulties in recruiting new volunteers and identifying individuals willing to take on Chair roles. Concerns were raised about the potential loss of experienced and committed Chairs due to the current restrictions. **Trustees agreed** to temporarily waive the one-term limit for Chairs for a period of one year. This will allow time to review the scheme of delegation, address succession planning, and assess the necessity of maintaining the current term limitation. <u>Board sub committee chairs</u> Mr Schwarz informed the Board of his intention to step down from Chair of Standards and Outcomes Committee once a suitable successor was in place. Mr Quigley has also stated his intention to step down from Chair of Governance and Partnership Committee, due to increased commitments. Mr Schwarz considered that the role of chair of Governance and Partnership supported the role of Chair of Board and was inclined to consider taking this role if able to relinquish the role of Standards and Outcomes Committee chair. All Board members were encouraged to reflect on the opportunity and to speak with either Mr. Schwarz or Mrs Harrison Hill to have a discussion and express interest. **Action:** It was agreed that it would be helpful to identify any potential candidates for the subcommittee chair roles within the next few weeks to ensure a smooth transition. <u>Chair of Board elections</u> It was discussed that it is an annual requirement to elect the Chair of Board each academic year, Mr Schwarz confirmed that he was willing to stand as Chair again, but if any other Trustees wanted to also be considered for the role to inform Mrs Harrison Hill before the next Board meeting in September. **Action:** Trustees wishing to stand as Chair of Board for 2025/2026 to inform Mrs Harrison Hill by end of September 2025.	**Trustees** **Trustees**
8. **DAT/158/2425**	**CEO update on strategic planning cycle** Mr Cotton referred to the planning cycle reported in the CEO Report. A planning day is being arranged for Executives and Trustees to discuss and shape the strategy considering the national priorities. Mr Cotton discussed the considerable changes being released from government and work being undertaken to amalgamate the priorities to inform the planning cycle. **Trustees queried** if the curriculum review had been published yet and were informed that it is expected in the Autumn term, with an expected implementation period of two years. Once all the information is known from the various reviews it will inform how to reshape the priorities for the Trust over the next five years.	
9. **DAT/159/2425**	**Trustee Questions on pre reading pack.** **Document:** **pre-reading pack** was previously received by the Board.	

	The pre-reading pack provided the following documents: CEO Board report (confidential) Safeguarding report Walton Academy term dates consultation responses Corporate risk register Minutes of Committee meetings (Summer term 2) (Confidential) Internal Audit reports 3 Year internal audit plan & Kreston report 5 Year financial forecast and 2025/26 to 2029/2030 budget (confidential report) Financial performance reports March, April 2025 Pay and reward policy Trustee meeting calendar Standard and Outcomes visit dates Letter from secretary of state 8 June 2025 Accounting Officer letter June 2025 Academy Trust Handbook September 2025 (and briefing summary) Academy trust Governance Guide September 2025 (and briefing summary) The Chair invited questions from trustees on the pre reading pack:	
DAT/160/2425	<u>CEO Report questions</u> Trustees invited Mr Cotton to provide a brief overview of the strategic objectives for the next 12 months, as outlined in the CEO report. Mr Cotton referred trustees to page 4, which details the three strategic objectives, each year workstreams are developed to support delivery of the objectives. For 2025/26, improving pupil attendance will be a central theme embedded across all strategic priorities to ensure maximum impact on children's outcomes. Trustees also discussed the ambitions outlined on page 3, noting that each ambition is closely linked to attendance and its wider implications. A **trustee raised a question** regarding the five-year strategic plan, suggesting that its development be deferred by a year due to current uncertainties. This would allow the Trust to focus on the current objectives and gradually shape the next strategic cycle as more guidance becomes available from the government. Mr. Cotton explained that a recent school improvement workshop involving over 60 senior leaders, business, and education leaders had focused on clearly defining the problems the Trust is trying to solve within each ambition. The autumn term will be used to review progress, assess impact, and refine actions. He emphasised the importance of defining problems thoroughly before implementing solutions. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was reported in the confidential minutes. Another **trustee raised a concern** about the lack of reference to parental engagement, particularly in secondary schools, within the four key ambitions aimed at improving attendance. **Further trustee questions** were raised on:	

	The relevance of the curriculum to today's learners. The development of critical thinking skills considering digital advancements. How the four ambitions align with the three strategic objectives. Mr. Cotton confirmed that this alignment is currently being reviewed. The intention is to ensure that themes such as attendance, leadership and management, and parental engagement are not treated as isolated initiatives but are embedded across all objectives. This is still in the early stages of development, and further work will be done to ensure coherence and clarity in the final plan with the ambitions overlaying the strategic objectives. **Trustees referred** to Retford Oaks Academy and Walton Academy pupil numbers, Mr Cotton explained that Retford Oaks Academy pupil numbers are improving, Walton Academy is due to a declining demographic in the area. Primary school pupil numbers have reached a peak and are now declining which is a challenge for the five-year plan. Secondary pupil numbers will also start to decline. **Trustees queried** if the housing development near Walton Academy was still expected to go ahead, Mr Cotton confirmed this had not been confirmed by Lincolnshire Council who were experiencing a decline in pupil population across the county.	
DAT/161/2425	<u>Walton Academy change of term dates approval</u> **Trustees approved** the change in term dates for Walton academy having received the consultation responses report.	
DAT/162/2425	<u>Committee Minutes/reports questions</u> The Chair asked trustees if they had any questions to raise on the minutes previously received for the board sub committees. Confidential: This item was deemed confidential and was recorded in the confidential minutes.	
DAT/163/2425	<u>Any points from Committees that Chairs wish to raise with the Board</u> Mr Storey informed the Board that the risk register had been a focus for the Audit and Risk Committee this year. Practical steps are being made to identify where changes to the risk register are made, moving the documentation from Excel to Word. The addition of agreed risk appetites has been added to the risk register following work by the committees. Artificial intelligence has been flagged as an area to report on risk. **Trustees queried** the reference to AMCOE on the risk register, it was clarified that the ranking using AMCOE was being removed from the policy to replace with the use of low, medium and high. **Trustees queried** if Governance and Partnership and Finances and Resources committees were challenging PFI contractors to release funds back into the trust. The Board were informed that Mr Corban was bringing an update to Finance and Resources committee to update on this work undertaken. The Standards and Outcomes Committee had proposed that the Board write to attendance leads across the trust to congratulate them on work undertaken. The trustees agreed this approach.	

        DAT/164/2425	**Action:** Governance professional to draft a letter to distribute on Chairs behalf. **Trustees asked** about the planned follow-up from their attendance at Local Academy Committee (LAC) meetings, how feedback will be shared with LAC Chairs, and whether this engagement will continue. Mr Schwarz explained that this will be considered as part of the ERG action plan. Questions from other pre reading pack items There were no further questions from the pre reading pack.	**JHH/DS**
10. **DAT/165/2425** **DAT/166/2425** **DAT/167/2425** **DAT/168/2425** **DAT/169/2425**	**Approvals required by Board** • Pay & reward policy Trustees approved the pay and reward policy. • Corporate Risk register **Trustees queried** what exactly they were approving for the corporate risk register, Mr Storey explained that approval was for the changes made to reflect the conversations and changes requested through the committee meetings review of risks, mitigations and risk appetites. Noting that this is not a final document as the register continues to be a working document under constant review. **Trustees approved** the corporate risk register. Trustee 2025/26 meeting calendar **Trustees approved** the 2025/26 Board and sub committee meeting calendar. Confidential items This item was approved in agenda item 9**.** 2025/26 to 2027 consolidated budget & addendum **Trustees approved** the 2025/26 to 2027 budget plan and addendum for submission.	
11. **DAT/170/2425**	**Reflection on revised agenda style and Borad pre reading pack** Trustees discussed the revised agenda and pre reading pack. It was agreed that links would be inserted into the pre reading pack only and not the agenda. Trustees discussed the use of AI to support strategic questioning; a session will be arranged by the governance professional to show how AI can be utilised for this purpose. **Action:** Governance professional to arrange AI Session prior to Board meeting.	 **JHH/DS**
12. **DAT/171/2425**	**Determination of Confidentiality** Trustees considered whether anything discussed during the meeting should be deemed as confidential. It was resolved: **-** An item discussed in agenda item 4 DAT/11/2425 would remain confidential until complete - An item discussed in agenda item 5 DAT/153/2425 would remain confidential until complete. - Documents related to agenda item 9 DAT/159/2425 would remain confidential until complete. An item discussed in agenda item 9 DAT/160/2425 would remain confidential until complete. -An item discussed in agenda item 9 DAT/162/2425 would remain confidential until complete. -A Document related to agenda item 10 DAT/165/2425 would remain confidential until complete. **Equalities Act consideration**	

	Trustees confirmed that the Equality Act was considered and complied with throughout discussions, where relevant **Have decisions been made according to the 7 Nolan Principles** Trustees held the meeting and discussions in accordance with the 7 Nolan principles. **Consider any item to be referred to Charities Commission.** No items were required for reporting to the charities commission or DfE.	
13. **DAT/172/2425**	Date and time of next meeting: **Wednesday 8 October 2025, 5.00pm** at Retford Education Centre, Retford.	

The meeting closed at:18.58

Minutes agreed by Chair: