

PARTNERSHIP LEARNING

GOVERNANCE STATEMENT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2019

Scope of responsibility

As Directors we acknowledge we have overall responsibility for ensuring that Partnership Learning has an effective and appropriate system of control, financial and otherwise. However, such a system is designed to manage rather than eliminate the risk of failure to achieve business objectives, and can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance against material misstatement or loss.

The board of directors has delegated the day-to-day responsibility to the CEO, as accounting officer, for ensuring financial controls conform with the requirements of both propriety and good financial management and in accordance with the requirements and responsibilities assigned to it in the funding agreement between Partnership Learning and the Secretary of State for Education. They are also responsible for reporting to the board of directors any material weaknesses or breakdowns in internal control.

Governance

The information on governance included here supplements that described in the Directors' Report and in the Statement of Directors' Responsibilities. The board of directors has formally met five times during the year. Up to and including the Autumn Term 2018-19 the Board met only once a term, but from January 2019 onwards the Board met half-termly, thus meeting the new recommendation to meet six times per year. This will be the on-going pattern. The Board was still able to maintain effective oversight of funds during the Autumn Term 2018-19 because its Audit and Finance Committees both met during this term and reported to that term's Board Meeting. Attendance during the year at meetings of the board of directors was as follows:

Directors	Meetings attended	Out of possible
D Singleton (Resigned 1 February 2019)	1	1
A Lazell	4	5
J Farquharson (Resigned 1 July 2019)	0	4
R Leighton (Accounting Officer)	5	5
I Rowley (Resigned 16 October 2019)	5	5
S Mubashar (Chair of Trustees)	5	5
P McPartland (Chair of Finance)	5	5

During the year the Chair of Directors, the CEO and the Clerk to the Directors carried out an informal self-review of governance. The review determined that there was a need to explore adding to the number and range of expertise of Directors and attempting to address the current gender imbalance. The Directors intend to commission an external review of governance during the 2019-20 academic year.

The Finance Committee is a sub-committee of the main board of directors. Its purpose is to oversee Financial Management & Policies and General Financial Matters and provide financial scrutiny and oversight.

Attendance at meetings in the year was as follows:

Directors	Meetings attended	Out of possible
J Farquharson (Resigned 1 July 2019)	0	3
S Mubashar (Chair of Trustees)	3	3
P McPartland (Chair of Finance)	3	3

The Audit Committee is a sub-committee of the main board of directors. Its purpose is to oversee External Audit, the Internal Controls Framework (including Internal Audit), Financial Management & Policies and General Financial Matters.

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Attendance at meetings in the year was as follows:

Directors	Meetings attended	Out of possible
D Singleton (Resigned 1 February 2019)	1	1
J Farquharson (Resigned 1 July 2019)	1	3
S Mubashar (Chair of Trustees)	2	3
P McPartland (Chair of Finance)	2	3

Review of value for money

As accounting officer the CEO has responsibility for ensuring that the academy trust delivers good value in the use of public resources. The accounting officer understands that value for money refers to the educational and wider societal outcomes achieved in return for the taxpayer resources received.

The Board of Directors are committed to achieving 'Value for Money' in all decisions made. The Board of Directors use the principles of 'Value for Money' as they commit to securing continuous improvement across the trust through:

- Regularly reviewing the functions of the Trust and its schools, challenging how and why services are provided and setting targets and performance indicators for improvement;
- Monitoring outcomes and comparing performance within the Trust, both between schools in the Trust and with other schools;
- Consulting appropriate stakeholders before major decisions are made, in line with the scheme of financial delegation;
- Promoting fair competition through quotations and tenders to ensure that goods and services are procured in the most economic, efficient and effective way.

The purpose of the system of internal control

The system of internal control is designed to manage risk to a reasonable level rather than to eliminate all risk of failure to achieve policies, aims and objectives. It can therefore only provide reasonable and not absolute assurance of effectiveness. The system of internal control is based on an on-going process designed to identify and prioritise the risks to the achievement of academy trust policies, aims and objectives, to evaluate the likelihood of those risks being realised and the impact should they be realised, and to manage them efficiently, effectively and economically. The system of internal control has been in place in Partnership Learning for the period 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements.

Capacity to handle risk

The board of Directors has reviewed the key risks to which the academy trust is exposed together with the operating, financial and compliance controls that have been implemented to mitigate those risks. The board of Directors is of the view that there is a formal ongoing process for identifying, evaluating and managing the academy trust's significant risks that has been in place for the period 1 September 2018 to 31 August 2019 and up to the date of approval of the annual report and financial statements. This process is regularly reviewed by the board of Directors.

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GOVERNANCE STATEMENT (CONTINUED)

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 AUGUST 2019

The risk and control framework

The academy trust's system of internal financial control is based on a framework of regular management information and administrative procedures including the segregation of duties and a system of delegation and accountability. In particular it includes:

- comprehensive budgeting and monitoring systems with an annual budget and periodic financial reports which are reviewed and agreed by the board of directors;
- regular reviews by the finance and general purposes committee of reports which indicate financial performance against the forecasts and of major purchase plans, capital works and expenditure programmes;
- setting targets to measure financial and other performance;
- clearly defined purchasing (asset purchase or capital investment) guidelines;
- delegation of authority and segregation of duties;
- identification and management of risks.

The board of directors has considered the need for a specific internal audit function and has decided not to appoint a responsible officer. However the Directors have appointed Essex County Council as Internal Auditor (IA).

The checks carried out in the period included:

- testing of payroll systems
- testing of purchase systems
- testing of control account/ bank reconciliations

The internal auditor will be providing, on a termly basis, reports to the Board of Directors on financial matters and performing a range of checks on the Academy Trust's financial systems. The internal auditor will be providing on a termly basis; the internal auditor reports to the Board of Directors on the operation of the systems of control and on the discharge of the Board of Director's financial responsibilities.

The internal auditors have delivered their schedule of work as planned. A number of recommendations were made to further improve internal controls and effective remedial actions have been put in place to implement these recommendations.

Review of effectiveness

As accounting officer the CEO has responsibility for reviewing the effectiveness of the system of internal control. During the year in question the review has been informed by:

- the work of the internal auditor;
- the work of the external auditor;
- the financial management and governance self-assessment process;
- the work of the executive managers within the academy trust who have responsibility for the development and maintenance of the internal control framework.

The accounting officer has been advised of the implications of the result of their review of the system of internal control by the finance committees and a plan to address weaknesses and ensure continuous improvement of the system is in place.

Approved by order of the board of directors on and signed on its behalf by:

R Leighton
Accounting Officer

S Mubashar
Chair of Trustees
