



Date 14 January 2025

Subject ESFA Management Board

Security classification OFFICIAL – FOR PUBLICATION

Present

Members

Martin Spencer (MS)	Non-Executive Director, Chair
Harjit Sandhu (HS)	Non-Executive Director
Peter Kane (PK)	Non-Executive Director
Paul Woodgates (PW)	Non-Executive Director
David Withey (DW)	Chief Executive Officer, ESFA
Andrew Thomas (AT)	Director, ESFA
Gemma Peck (GP)	Director, ESFA

Others in attendance

Jane Cunliffe (JC)	DfE Senior Sponsor
James Koziaryn (JK)	ESFA
Bronwyn Ward	ESFA
Sasha Jones (SJ)	ESFA, Secretariat
Fay Probert (FP)	ESFA
	ESFA
	ESFA

Apologies

Peter Kane (PK)

Ruth Humphreys (RHu)

1. Welcome and introductions – MS

- 1.1. MS opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.
- 1.2. No new declarations of interest were made. DW announced his new role as Principal/CEO of SGS College and noted his removal of involvement with work relating to SGS, GP and AT are stepping into the decision-making space.
- 1.3. The minutes of 17 October 2024 Management Board meeting were agreed.
- 1.4. The action log was reviewed. Action 25 the only open action.

2. Audit & Risk Committee Update – HS

- 2.1. HS provided an update from ARC meetings on 3 December 2024 and 14 January 2025, noting that an AO letter will be issued after DW steps down, with responsibilities passing to the Permanent Secretary.
- 2.2. HS provided an update on the ARA timelines, CARD Assurance plan, risk deep dive, assurance mapping, an update from GIAA and NAO, and a risk update.
- 2.3. Management Board noted that AT is the accountable individual for the progress and completion of the ARA and any governance issues that arise when DW steps down. GP and AT are responsible for any delivery issues in their respective directorates.
- 2.4. Management Board discussed the forward look of GIAA work for CARD and Funding when the directorates join OIG.

Action: DW to provide a note to Management Board on who is on point during the final 3 weeks of March.

3. Chief Executive's update – DW

- 3.1. DW provided an update and was pleased to report good performance outcomes on all key indicators for 2024/25.
- 3.2. DW noted decision to step down ESFA-specific comms and for colleagues to join OIG comms, also noting big changes in personnel in corporate teams. DW recorded his thanks for RH and TK and their teams for their work contributing to the corporate life of the Agency.
- 3.3. DW provided an update on transition/closure comms to the sector. DW highlighted that internally the transition is going well, noting the positive People Survey results for the Agency.
- 3.4. DW noted his thanks for Management Board and the position that the Non-Executive Directors have helped to get the Agency to.

4. Sponsorship Chair update – JC

- 4.1. JC provided the sponsorship update and noted her thanks to DW, AT and GP for the transition going smoothly and agreed with DW's positive sentiment.
- 4.2. JC provided an update on 2025/26 business planning and the Spending Review process, noting conversations and teach-ins with AT and GP and teams and the merging of ESFA and DfE Counter Fraud teams.
- 4.3. JC noted that an ESFA risk has been elevated to a department top tier risk, noting the importance of policy and delivery teams being joined up.

5. Performance update – AT & GP

- 5.1. AT provided an update on CARD directorate performance including bursary and free school meals work, assurance audits and debt recovery management.
- 5.2. GP provided an update on Funding directorate performance including funding streams, disapplication, accuracy and timeliness of allocations, noting good performance against metrics.

6. Transition update – AT

- 6.1. AT provided an update on the transition and closure of the ESFA.
- 6.2. Management Board discussed the roles of spend manager and budget holder and noted that the department is advising the Permanent Secretary on AO arrangements.
- 6.3. Management Board discussed knowledge management.
- 6.4. AT noted that ESFA comms and activity will be reduced in the lead up to closure as ESFA colleagues begin to join OIG comms and activity, noting that AT and GP are now joining OIG SLT meetings.

7. People Update - BW

- 7.1. BW was pleased to report the very positive CS People Survey results across the agency, noting that overall engagement improved in 2024/25. Directors are working on improvement actions and the focus is on wellbeing and supporting staff through the transition and beyond. BW noted that Agency Ambassadors (AAs) have very successfully provided a route for staff to provide feedback to ET.
- 7.2. BW noted the people team community across the department for sharing best and new practices.

Action: BW to bring a summary paper of good people and governance practice that led to the ESFA's successful People Survey results.

Action: FP and JM to prepare a draft formal handover from MS as chair of Management Board to JC as ESFA sponsor to share good practice governance.
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- 7.3. Management Board thanked DW, AT, GP and colleagues across the agency's work in supporting the agency's people priorities during a period of change.

8. AOB/below the line papers - MS

- 8.1. MS and Management Board noted their extreme thanks for DW's work for the ESFA over the past 2 years and thanked AT and GP for their contributions.

8.2. MS closed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending.

Meeting closed