

**FOR PUBLICATION EXCLUDING RESERVED BUSINESS**

**STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE**

**GOVERNING BODY MEETING ON 30 NOVEMBER 2021 AT 2PM IN ROOM SR1, MAIN BUILDING & VIA MS TEAMS**

**Governing Body:** Professor Sir Desmond Rea (Chair), Mr E Jardine (Vice-Chair), Mrs C Moore, Mr R Thompson, Mrs H Miller, Ms M Corrigan, Professor D Jones, Mr P Weil, Dr A Brown, Mr D Feely, Miss M Magee, Professor J. Heggarty, Mr W Patterson, K Nelson, Dr M Bennett, Dr L Boyce

**In Attendance:** Ms K Robinson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Ms J O'Boyle (Head of Finance – Items 5 & 6)

**Apologies:** Dr E Birnie

**Any Other Business:** None

**AGENDA**

**GB/5/21/1.1 INTRODUCTION**

5/21/1.1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Due to the current COVID-19 situation, meeting in-person was limited to 5 Members – the Chair, the Vice-Chair, Mrs Moore, Mr Thompson and Professor Heggarty and the Head of Finance for Items 5 & 6 on the Agenda. All other Members and the Secretary to the Governing Body, joined the meeting via MS Teams.

5/21/1.1.2 As this was the Chair's final meeting before the end of his term of Office on 31 December 2021, the Vice-Chair and Principal, separately

thanked him for his leadership, support and service to the Governing Body and the College, over the last eight years. Some examples of the Chair's legacy included, amongst other examples, his contribution to moving forward the Pitches Project, the engagement with Bishop Treanor regarding joint delivery of the Religious Education Certificate to students at the College and his influence in the establishment of a Joint Research Working Group at Queen's University (QUB), in consultation with the Vice-Chancellor. The latter has enabled the College to move forward with the development of the case for approval to proceed with its Professional Doctorate proposal.

- 5/21/1.1.3 On behalf of the academic staff in the College the Academic Staff Representative echoed the thanks extended by the Vice-Chair and the Principal and supplemented this with thanks to the Chair for the work that had been undertaken under his leadership in streamlining the mechanisms of governance.
- 5/21/1.1.4 The Governing Body extended its best wishes for the future and it was hoped that the Chair would join the College in its forthcoming Centenary celebrations.
- 5/21/1.1.5 The Chair acknowledged the warm thanks he had received.

**GB5/21/1.2 APOLOGIES**

- 5/21/1.2.1 The apology from Dr Birnie was noted.

**GB/5/21/1.3 CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

- 5/21/1.3.1 No conflicts of interest were declared.

**GB/5/21/1.4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

- 5/21/1.4.1 There was no other business to discuss, other than that included on the main Agenda and under Reserved Business.

**GB/5/21/2**                    **MINUTES OF THE MEETING ON 14 SEPTEMBER 2021 AND MATTERS ARISING**

5/21/2.1                    The Minutes of the previous meeting on 14 September 2021 were agreed.

5/21/2.2                    There were no action Points outstanding from previous meetings.

**Matters Arising**

5/21/2.3                    A paper on Governor Training and Development would be taken under Item 9 on the Agenda **(4/21/4.9)**.

5/21/2.4                    The Governance in the Round paper would be taken under Item 11 **(4/21/13.1)**.

5/21/2.5                    There were no other matters arising.

**GB/5/21/3**                    **COMMITTEE REPORTS**

**Education Committee Meeting on 2 November 2021**

5/21/3.1                    Members received an overview from the Chair of the Education Committee on the discussions that had taken place at the Education Committee meeting on 2 November 2021. Members noted the following:

- That this was Dr Bennett's first meeting as the new Chair of the Committee. Tribute was paid to Mr Thompson who had chaired the Committee effectively and positively for the previous eight years. The new Principal was welcomed to his first meeting of the Committee.
- The minutes of the June 2021 meeting were approved unanimously.
- Reports were received from each of the four Directors: all made reference to the significant pressures that had come from continuing business during the Covid crisis and their pleasure (and that of the students) at having students back on campus.
- Various research bids have been submitted to date with a success rate of 50%. Further bids are in the pipeline. This area of work has

grown significantly over recent years and SUC's role in quality research is growing. The principal indicated that he would use opportunities to encourage other Bodies such as DfE and DE to commission work.

- A Fresh Start' has been well-received and DE has made some positive responses to the recommendations.
- The outcomes from some of the work on underachievement are beginning to impact the work of the College itself - for example on the management and focus of school placements.
- A key issue going forward is the absence of longitudinal DATA on achievements of individual groups of learners in NI over time.
- A key part of the Teaching and Learning report was the submission of the annual Quality Assurance Report for the Governing Body. The Education Committee gave its approval to that report.
- Dr Eaton also explained that all assessments had moved on-line during Covid and will remain on -line, including most of the student's school placement work. Software is being developed to manage this more effectively.
- Reserved Business.
- There was a very favourable report on the residential event that took place for all new students.
- Some discussion also focused on the limitations of the Graduates Outcome Survey which has replaced, and is very different from the previous Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey. The outcomes are positive but do not provide sufficient contextual detail.
- Overall, student recruitment remains strong across most courses but M.Ed and CPD are ripe for expansion.
- M Teach (fully online) enrolments are growing in the local market but the aim is also to grow it internationally.
- It has been agreed that Erasmus students can continue to come to NI after 2023 even though the scheme will then be closed to NI students securing positions within EU. Stranmillis' application to the Turing Scheme was successful.
- New international partnerships are being sought and a couple have been established.

- The Committee considered a Paper on the operation of the Education Committee going forward.

In conclusion, the Chair of the Committee thanked the Secretary for her support in preparing for the meeting and the four Directors for their contribution.

### **Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting on 16 November 2021**

5/21/3.2

Members received an overview from the Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee on the discussions that had taken place at the Committee meeting on 16 November 2021. Members noted the following:

- The Committee considered the September 21 Management Accounts. There were no matters concerning the Accounts that caused concern; although the Committee noted that the conferencing side of the HACS business continues to be affected due to the pandemic. On the other hand, the Committee noted that Halls accommodation is full to capacity this year, which is having a positive impact on finances.
- The College has only received a provisional Funding Grant letter from the Department. The Department has subsequently confirmed that the related arrears will be paid shortly.
- The Committee endorsed the draft Financial Statements and provisional Audit findings for 2020-21. The Committee was content that the Accounts provide a comprehensive statement of the College's Finances and its Governance during 2020-21 and that there were no matters that would need to be drawn to the attention of the Governing Body. While the External Audit Report was not available for the meeting, the Committee welcomed the provisional news from the Head of Finance that there were no adjusted or unadjusted misstatements over a clearly trivial amount to note and the review of Internal Control did not identify any internal control deficiencies throughout the audit testing. Congratulations were extended to the College for this excellent result. Thanks were also extended to staff who were involved in the preparation of the Accounts and for the tight control that has, and continues to be exercised, over College finances.
- The Committee considered an update on the College's Value for Money Action Plan. The Committee noted that the savings achieved

in 2020-21 were minimal and that a review of the approach to VfM action planning would be appropriate.

- The Committee reviewed a comprehensive paper on Halls pricing, which included a detailed analysis and rationale for a modest increase across all of the Hall's accommodation types, and in particular, for the Single Standard Catered Bedroom, which will ensure that the College Halls prices remain competitive in the current market.
- The Committee agreed that priority should be given to the upgrade of the College's fire alarm system. The Committee will be closely monitoring progress of this project.
- The Committee considered the College Annual Report for 2020-21 and recommended that it be endorsed by the Governing Body. It is a good account of the College's performance last year and staff are to be commended for their achievements.
- The Committee extended its thanks to the Chair of the Governing Body for his input to the work of the Committee and extended its best wishes for the future.

### **Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Meeting on 25 November 2021**

5/21/3.3.1

Members received an overview from the Chair of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (ARAC) on the discussions that had taken place at the ARAC meeting on 25 November 2021. Members noted the following:

- I. Mrs Miller was welcomed to her first meeting as a new Member of the Committee.
- II. There were no issues raised in the Private Session with the Department's representative and the representatives from Internal and External Audit. All the representatives informed the Committee that there had been full co-operation by Colleges staff during the 2020-21 year.
- III. The Committee congratulated the College for the excellent audit results and the fact that the Audit Report was unqualified.
- IV. The Committee is content that the Principal signs the Letter of Representation.
- V. The Committee agreed that some minor amendments needed to be made to the text of the Accounts. These have now been made and

the Committee is content for the Accounts to be signed off by the Chair and the Principal.

5/21/3.3.2

The Governing Body noted the overview of the ARAC Annual Report 2020-21; and in particular:

- the thanks extended to Dr Bennett for her contribution to the Committee given that she has become Chair of the Education Committee;
- that the Committee is satisfied that the quality of information it has received from the College Executive Team throughout 2020-21 is sufficient and adequate to enable it to make informed decisions. Assurances on data quality are provided through the work of Internal and External Audit and internal controls are in place to validate accuracy and completeness of the information presented;
- that the Committee acknowledges the requirement to comply with all statutory obligations and recommendations, whilst being mindful of the constant need to achieve Value for Money and the practicalities of ensuring the effective and efficient running of the University College; and
- that based on the assurances received from Internal and External Audit in respect of 2020-21, the ARAC is satisfied that the University College's arrangements for corporate governance, internal control and risk management are basically sound, that the audited Financial Statements can be relied upon and that the Principal as Accounting Officer is entitled to rely on the assurances that have been received from the Internal and External Auditors.

5/21/3.3.3

The Governing Body noted that there were no new Direct Award Contracts in 2020-21.

5/21/3.3.4

The Governing Body noted that ARAC were content with the updated Corporate Risk Register. It was further noted that management had been asked to consider the amalgamation of two of the Risks on the Register.

**GB/5/21/4**

#### **ENDORSEMENT OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

5/21/4.1

The Governing Body endorsed the following Minutes:

- Education Committee 8 June 2021 and 30 July 2021.

- Finance & General Purposes Committee 25 May 2021 and 12 October 2021.
- Audit & Risk Assurance Committee 8 July 2021 and 23 September 2021.

**GB/5/21/5                    SEPTEMBER 2021 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS AND ASSOCIATED COMMENTARY**

5/21/5.1                    The Head of Finance introduced her Report.

5/21/5.2                    Given that the September 2021 Management Accounts were considered at the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting on 16 November 2021, and in the absence of any questions from Governing Body Members, the Management Accounts were noted.

**GB/5/21/6                    FINANCIAL STATEMENTS & AUDIT FINDINGS 2020-21**

5/21/5.1                    Based on the consideration of the Financial Statements and Audit Findings for 2020-21, and in the absence of any further questions or comments from other Members, the Accounts were endorsed and would be duly signed off at the end of the meeting.

**GB/5/21/7                    PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

5/21/7.1                    The Principal introduced his Report which was in three parts:

(1) The Quality Assurance Report for 2020-21. As the Report had already been considered by the Education Committee and in the absence of any further comments or questions from other Members of the Governing Body, the Report was endorsed. The Governing Body also agreed that the Principal could rely on the Report for the purposes of providing the following assurance to the Department:

*'As Governor and on behalf of the Governing Body, I confirm that for the 2020-21 academic year and up to the date of signing the return:*

- *the Governing Body has received and discussed a report and accompanying action plan relating to the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes;*
- *the methodologies used as a basis to improve the student academic experience and student outcomes are, to the best of our knowledge, robust and appropriate; and*

- *the standards of awards for which we are responsible have been appropriately set and maintained.'*

(2) Research Integrity at SUC (Annual Statement). The Governing Body noted the content of the Annual Statement and agreed that it could be signed off.

(3) The COVID19 update was noted.

5/21/7.2 In response to a question from the Vice-Chair, the Principal informed Members that the College is in the process of taking guidance on how to progress with the appointment of two new Visiting Professors.

**GB/5/21/8 COLLEGE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-21**

5/21/8.1 The College Annual Report for the year 2021-22 was endorsed and will be published on the Internet in due course.

**GB/5/21/9 GOVERNOR TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020-21**

5/21/9.1 Members endorsed the Governor Training and Development Plan for 2020-21, as introduced by the Chair of the HR & Remuneration Committee. The Plan was completed following a Training Needs Analysis. Members noted from the Plan that it will be possible to meet the majority of Training and Development needs in-year. Those that cannot be met because course dates have been missed will be carried forward to 2022-23.

5/21/9.2 Members noted the funding that has been allocated for Training and Development in the current year given that little training had been possible in 2020-21 due to COVID-19. Budget requirements for 2021-22 will be determined in due course.

5/21/9.3 Two Members commented on the very useful 'On Board' Training course and the Audit Committee Training.

5/21/9.4 Members noted that the Secretary would be in contact with Members regarding preferred dates for courses and would book places on Members' behalf.

**GB/5/21/10 STUDENT PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

5/21/10.1 The Student President introduced her Report on:

- 'freshers' Week,
- international students,
- clubs & societies,
- charity work,
- housing issues,
- 'stressless' week, and
- graduation.

5/21/10.2 The Governing Body noted the Report and wished the Student President well.

**GB/5/21/11 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

5/21/11.1. The Chair of the Governing Body introduced a comprehensive report on Governance in the College, including a report on the College's compliance with the Committee of University Chairs' (CUC) Code of Governance for Higher Education Institutions and the results of a survey of Governance Effectiveness.

5/21/11.2 The Chair emphasised the importance of maintaining strong relationships with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and Queen's University. Members were also encouraged to familiarise themselves with the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum agreed between DfE and the College and the Memorandum of Understanding agreed between QUB and the College in order to fully understand the relationships that exist.

5/21/11.3 The Governing Body agreed that the results of the review of College practice against the CUC Code and the results of the survey provided positive evidence of good practice across a broad range of areas. The Governing Body also agreed that discussions should take place in due course on the questions raised in the paper.

**GB/5/21/12 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

5/21/12.1 The Corporate Risk Register, which had been considered by the ARAC on 25 November 2021 was endorsed.

**GB/5/21/13 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

5/21/13.1 The staff and student representatives were asked to leave the meeting for the discussion of Reserved Business.

**GB/5/21/14**

**RESERVED BUSINESS**

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date 15/2/22

Chair of the Governing Body