

GB/4/23

Final Agreed

MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29th NOVEMBER 2023 AT 2.30PM IN SLEMISH ROOM, REFECTORY BUILDING

Present: Mr Edgar Jardine (Chair); Dr Lavinia Boyce; Dr Maureen Bennett; Dr Andy Brown; Ms Majella Corrigan; Mr Mattew Cupples; Mr Robert Drennan; Mr Darren Feely; Prof Jonathan Heggarty; Ms Paula Leitch; Mrs Heather Miller; Ms Kim Scott; Mr Sam Snodden; Mr Peter Weil;

In Attendance: Mr Raymond DeLargy (Director of Corporate Services & Development) for items 5, 6 & 10; Ms Jo O'Boyle (Head of Finance) for items 5 & 6; Prof Ken Gibson (Director of Student & Learning Services) for item 12; Ms Karen Robinson & Mr Ian Elliott (Secretariat to the Governing Body).

Apologies: Ms Una Nic Eoin; Mr Aaron Diver; Mrs Wilma Fee;

AGENDA ITEM.

GB/4/23/1 WELCOME & INTRODUCTION.

4/23/1.1 The Chair welcomed everyone.

RESERVED BUSINESS

4/23/1.2 Apologies were noted from Ms Una Nic Eoin, Mr Aaron Diver and Mrs Wilma Fee.

4/23/1.3 There were no conflicts of interest to record.

4/23/1.4 Any other business not on agenda would include reference to the success of the current College pantomime.

GB/4/23/2 RESERVED BUSINESS

GB/4/23/3 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS HELD 27 SEPTEMBER 2023, ACTION POINTS AND MATTERS ARISING.

4/23/3.1 The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27 September 2023 were agreed as a true record and duly signed by the Chair.

4/23/3.2 Regarding the meeting with the DfE, the Principal noted that for capital projects the Department normally covers 100% for FE colleges, while Stranmillis (as with other HEIs) only gets 90% grant. However, the College remains content with this under the Partnership Agreement terms.

4/23/3.3 There were no other action points or matters arising to consider.

GB/4/23/4 OVERVIEW OF COMMITTEE MEETINGS

4/23/4.1 Education Committee 25th October 2023

4/23/4.1.1 The Committee Chair referred to key issues including signing off on the assurance statement for the DfE. There was some discussion about strategic concerns regarding external threats to the business of the College. Reference was made to the Paper which had been circulated, noting a reduction by 5% in the enrolled undergraduates. This raised a concern about what are the implications for College income in the future.

4/23/4.1.2 Members noted that the number of teachers registered in NI greatly outnumbered those teachers educated in Northern Ireland.

4/23/4.1.3 RESERVED BUSINESS

4/23/4.1.4

4/23/4.1.5 Members considered the issue of anxiety and resilience among students. It was noted that there are only 39 special schools in Northern Ireland which is inadequate to meet the increasing demand. There is also a question as to whether teachers are equipped to deal with the greater number of pupils with special educational needs.

4/23/4.1.6

The Principal advised that in Stranmillis there is an interest to deliver more programmes to support teachers. Special Educational Needs continues to require greater support for teachers along with related programmes of study. College staff are drivers in this process. It was noted that students in HEIs as well as school pupils are presenting with more mental health challenges. Stranmillis has a range of support for our students which will be monitored and added to as needed.

4/23/4.1.7

The Student President outlined his perception of resilience among students, which had been the subject of his own dissertation. He welcomed the various initiatives being undertaken in the College.

4/23/4.1.8

RESERVED BUSINESS

It was agreed that the Principal and Chair will continue to be in contact the VC and propose a meeting and to raise the matter then. The Principal is also meeting with other stakeholders to improve understanding of the mission and role of Stranmillis.

4/23/4.1.9

In response to a query about indications related to the payment of the block grant and funding by the DfE, it was noted that shortage of available funds prevails across public services.

4/23/4.1.10

The Chair returned to the issue of SEN and suggested that this could be a topic for the next Education committee on how to respond, which was readily accepted by the Committee Chair. Initially to consider an update and then undertake further consultations. Any recommendations can be discussed with the relevant personnel.

4/23/4.1.11

It was noted that the new MOA with QUB is due to be in place by

4/23/4.1.12

Members agreed that it would be a good idea to have an operational meeting with the DE as well as the DfE present at the Education Committee to consider how teacher education moves forward.

GB/4/23/4.2

Finance & General Purposes and Audit & Risk Assurance Joint Committee Meeting held 15th November 2023.

4/23/4.2.1

Members noted that the Financial Statements had been agreed. It was also noted that the Management Accounts for the period had been approved

4/23/4.2.2

It was agreed that the Annual Report should be accepted. Members agreed that it was a testimony to the outstanding work of the Principal and his team.

4/23/4.2.3

Approval was given to the to HACS Action Plan which had been circulated in the Governing Body papers.

GB/4/23/4.3

Audit & Risk Assurance Committee 22nd November 2023

4/23/4.3.1

It was noted that the External Auditor had no recommendations and the Committee had recommended sending the Accounts and Annual Report of the ARAC Committee to the Governing Body.

4/23/4.3.2 The Internal Audit had started with the firm of Sean Cavanagh & Co in place and no issues have arisen so far.

4/23/4.3.3 **Adoption of the above Committee Minutes**

On the proposal of the Chair all the Committee Meeting minutes were unanimously adopted.

GB/4/23/5 MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS SEPTEMBER 2023

The Director of Corporate Services & Development and the Head of Finance joined the meeting.

4/23/5.1 Reference was made to the September 2023 Management Accounts up to the second month of the financial year.

4/23/5.2 It was noted that the recurrent funding letter from the DfE had been received. The profile does not include income at this stage in the year therefore it shows a deficit in those months. There was nothing of concern noted and no questions were raised.

GB/4/23/6 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS, AUDIT FINDINGS AND THE SIGNING OF THE ACCOUNTS

4/23/6.1 The strong financial outcomes and clear audit findings were noted.

4/23//6.2 The Chair and the Principal duly signed the Financial Statements for the year and the Letter of Representation on behalf of the Governing Body and the College.

4/23/6.3 Reference was made to the earlier issue raised about the HACS Action Plan and the capacity of the team to deliver on the 20 proposals. The Director of Corporate Services and Development explained that there has been consolidation of proposals into 9 areas and that progress has already been made, for example with the success of filling the Halls as well as the significant rebound for business with conferencing. Some of the elements will be longer term, but in the short term there will be an opportunity to address a high percentage of the tasks.

The Head of Finance left the meeting

GB/4/23/7 FREEDOM OF INFORMATION: PUBLICATION SCHEME

4/23/7.1 The Director of Corporate Services and Development noted that activity following the recent external events in another part of the public sector and the issues surrounding how the College monitors, records and disseminates information. A decision has been taken to publish as much appropriate information as possible on the College website to provide information more readily which should reduce the

demand for FoI requests. The information is as up to date as possible and viewers can simply click to find it.

4/23/7.2 On the proposal of Ms Lavina Boyce, seconded by Mr Sam Snodden, the policy was approved.

The Director of Corporate Services & Development left the meeting.

GB/4/23/8

THE COLLEGE & PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

4/23/8.1 The Principal advised that the Annual Report and Quality Assurance Report needs approval to be sent to the Department. This was agreed.

4/23/8.2 RESERVED BUSINESS

4/23/8.3 Members noted upcoming consultations in relation to rates for student halls and student fees. The use of AI was discussed and indeed the potential misuse for plagiarism. It was noted that there are limited cases but still there is a need to raise awareness of AI and potential plagiarism. This will include consideration at the Education Committee including a presentation by relevant staff. Mrs Maureen Bennet also agreed to share a recent conference presentation on this topic.

4/23/8.4 On the proposal of Mr Sam Snodden, seconded by Mrs Maureen Bennett, the Report and Quality Assurance were approved for publication and submission to the DfE.

GB/4/23/9.0

CHAIR’S BUSINESS

4/23/9.1

The Chair paid tribute to the dedicated service of Ms Karen Robinson over the previous nine years in the role of Secretary to the Governing Body. He thanked her for her professional guidance and wished her well in her retirement. The Chair then welcomed the new Secretary Mr Ian Elliott and wished him well in his new role.

GB/4/23/10

STUDENT PRESIDENT’S REPORT

The Director of Student Support & Learning Services joined the meeting.

4/23/10.1

The Student President reported that the Students’ Union had been busy, including a well-attended Freshers’ Week. Numerous events had taken place to integrate new students. There had been the ‘Step out, Speak out’ week along with mental health charity support events and health fitness generally as positive work to raised funds. Clubs and Societies continue to flourish. The pantomime is undertaking 14 very well received shows. There has been a mid-point survey of student engagement with societies to help with retention and support.

4/23/10.2

The Director of Student Support & Learning Services referred to the Students’ Union year end accounts which had been circulated and signed off by the independent auditors Moore NI. There were no concerns. It was noted that the pantomime continues to be a good source of income as well as a popular social event for everyone.

Tribute was paid to the previous year’s Student President for the prudent Union administration and management of the its accounts. The financial gift from the College management was also appreciated.

The Staff and Student President left the meeting.

GB/4/23/11

RESERVED BUSINESS

GB/4/23/14

ANY OTHER BUSINESS

4/23/12.1

There being no further business the Chair wished everyone greetings of the season. The next meeting will take place on the 27 March 2024.

Signed:

Chair

Dated: