

**MINUTES OF STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S GOVERNING BODY  
MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 24 SEPTEMBER 2025 AT 15:00  
IN THE BOARDROOM, MAIN BUILDING**

**Present:** Mr Edgar Jardine (Chair), Dr Maureen Bennett, Dr Lavinia Boyce, Dr Andrew Brown (Teaching Staff Governor), Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Darren Feely (Support Staff Governor), Professor Jonathan Heggarty (Principal / Chief Executive), Ms Paula Leitch, Miss Jessica Martin (Student Governor), Mrs Heather Miller, Ms Una Nic Eoin, Mrs Kim Scott and Mr Sam Snodden.

**In Attendance:** Mr Raymond De Largy (Director of Corporate Services and Development) and Mr David McClure (Head of Finance) Item 8.

**Secretariat:** Miss Lindsay Armstrong.

The meeting commenced at 15.04.

**GB/3/25/1 INTRODUCTIONS**

3/25/1 The Chairman welcomed all attendees to the first Governing Body meeting of the 2025-2026 academic year.

He extended his congratulations to Dr Andrew Brown for his recent appointment to the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools, and its Diocesan Education Committees.

**GB/3/25/2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

3/25/2 Apologies for absence were received from Mr Aaron Diver and Mr Robert Drennan.

**GB/3/25/3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

3/25/3 No declarations of interest were received.

**GB/3/25/4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

3/25/4 No additional business was raised.

**GB/3/25/5 MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD 25 JUNE 2025**

3/25/5.1 The minutes of the meeting on 25 June 2025 were approved as an accurate record, subject to a recommendation to 2/25/6.3 to list policies approved at the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 11 June 2025.

### **Matters arising**

3/25/5.2 Members noted that all outstanding actions have been addressed.

### **GB/3/25/6 COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

#### **Overview of the Finance and General Purposes Committee 17 September 2025**

3/25/6 Mr Jardine provided an overview of discussions taking place at the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 17 September 2025, noting that an update on the current financial position would be provided during the course of the meeting.

He advised on a 3-year renewal licence agreement with CSSC, and informed Members that unforeseen capital maintenance works had taken place during the summer months.

Mr Jardine provided an update on the Sports Pitches, advising on delays due to environmental restrictions.

He informed that Hospitality, Accommodation and Catering received positive feedback from hosting summer groups, however they face recruitment challenges in catering.

### **GB/3/25/7 ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

#### **Finance and General Purposes 11 June 2025**

The Finance and General Purposes Committee minute of 11 June 2025 was unanimously adopted on proposal from Mr Snodden and seconded by Ms Leitch.

Mr McClure arrived at the meeting at 15.12 and was formally welcomed in his new role as Head of Finance.

### **GB/3/25/8 FINANCE PAPER**

3/25/8 Mr McClure referred Members to the previously distributed paper and confirmed that official confirmation on the Block Grant is pending. He informed that verbal agreement has been reached for an additional 15 non-ITE students.

Mr McClure advised that the NI Teachers Pension Funding Scheme is in line with expectations and reported a shortfall for Capital Funding which will be considered in the next monitoring round.

He informed the meeting that considerations to lease additional office space to BST in Main Building are ongoing, and confirmed that updated

Management Accounts will be provided at the next full meeting of the Governing Body.

Mr McClure confirmed that the audit for the DfE financial year ended 31 March 2025 is complete and advised on adjustments recommended by auditors regarding reclassification to the Sports Pitches within the Fixed Asset Note.

He reported an anticipated overall surplus of £66k in the Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2025, and informed Members that pension assets are not recorded in the Accounts, which will be presented at the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

Mr McClure advised that the External Auditors are now trading as Cooper Parry Audit (Ireland) Limited following acquisition.

Professor Heggarty provided an update on other possibly additional revenue streams. He referred to the Minister's new induction programme to support newly qualified teachers, considerations for a new part-time PGCE, and the Ministerial announcement to provide bursaries to tackle teacher shortages at post-primary level.

Members were informed that Stranmillis campus hosted the launch of the Bursary Scheme marketing initiative, and was instrumental in social media engagement.

Members discussed the Department for Education's role in promoting the continuous professional development of teachers. Ms Corrigan commented on the aim of the TransformED action plan to promote effective engagement with delivery partners.

Mr McClure left the meeting at 15.33.

#### **GB/3/25/9      CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

3/25/9      Professor Heggarty presented the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and spoke to a crucial time of year for Risk 1: Failure to recruit to full-time targets resulting in reduced student numbers.

He advised that the CRR will be updated to reflect inescapable pressure as a result of discussions arising from Committee meetings the previous week.

Mr Feely described an arduous yet successful recruitment process and highlighted a challenge regarding the late receipt of certain leaving certificates.

Professor Heggarty congratulated the Registry team for their efforts and discussed the constraints in preparing letters of offer within the UCAS

system. He advised that St. Mary's does not use the UCAS higher education system admissions service.

#### **GB/3/25/10 RISK MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE**

3/25/10 Mr De Largy presented the Risk Management Policy and Practice document for annual review, advising that updates have been made to address one Priory 3 recommendation from a recent audit to develop and maintain a risk archive for risks that have been removed or closed. He confirmed that the provision is reflected in the amended Policy and that a follow up report will be presented to the next meeting of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee to note.

The Risk Management Policy was approved without dissent.

#### **GB/3/25/11 DfE MID-YEAR ASSURANCE STATEMENT**

3/25/11 Professor Heggarty reminded Members of the University College's requirement to submit a mid-year assurance statement to the Sponsor Department.

In a response to Mr Snodden regarding entries not applicable, Mr De Largy advised that the College has taken cognisance of Departmental guidance when completing the returns. Members noted there is no obligation on the University College to conduct rural proofing.

Members noted that although there is no requirement for third party accreditation, Stranmillis has begun work towards Cyber Essential Accreditation, and that failure to adequately plan for and mitigate risk from cyber-attack, is reflected in the CRR.

Mr De Largy advised that the risk is being actively managed within the IT operational Risk Register.

#### **GB/3/25/12 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

3/25/12 Professor Heggarty advised that Stranmillis achieved commendable success in the latest National Student Survey results as having been awarded the highest result, return and student satisfaction as a HEI in NI.

He confirmed that student recruitment targets have been met and that Stran House has been refurbished under the supervision of Mrs Claire Kerr, now providing a facility for a student support and recreation.

Professor Heggarty provided detail on the major network incident experienced over the August Bank Holiday. He advised that the issue was ultimately identified as a broadcast storm caused by an IP conflict, which is extremely difficult to diagnose.

Members were advised that IT staff worked diligently for long hours to identify and rectify the problem and guidance was sought from colleagues in St. Mary's, Belfast Met and QUB, as well as JISC the firewall provider, to rule out a cyber-attack.

Professor Heggarty spoke to budget pressures and delays to the Sports Pitches Project.

He referred to the Visiting Professors report and sought Members approval for an honorarium of £5k each for the 2024-2025 academic year.

Members unanimously endorsed the payment. Dr Bennett referred to a useful engagement with the Visiting Professors in May 2025 and encouraged future arrangement with the Education Committee.

#### **GB/3/25/13      CORPORATE PLAN 2025-2028**

3/25/13      Professor Heggarty presented the Corporate Plan 2025-2028 and advised on staff consultation. Members unanimously approved the Plan.

Professor Heggarty outlined plans to formalise a 10-Year Plan focusing on teaching, staff and finances, and advised of the requirement to engage with stakeholders.

Mr De Largy advised on a separate 10-Year Estates Strategy in development.

Members considered the appropriate timing for engagement in the review process and deliberated on convening a workshop prior to the Christmas break.

#### **GB/3/25/14      DRAFT BUSINESS PLAN 2025-2026**

3/25/14      Professor Heggarty presented the draft Business Plan 2025-2026 setting out the College's strategy priorities.

Discussion took place regarding the measurement of outcomes, including data collection from the ICS review, the independently facilitated governance effectiveness review, ETI, and direct feedback from schools and stakeholder engagement.

Dr Brown described the rigorous validation process from QAAs and QUB, and the assurances provided through various partnership agreements.

Discussion centred around tracking feedback.

## **GB/3/25/15 PROGRESS AGAINST KPIs**

3/25/15 Members noted that most KPIs were achieved or largely achieved.

Professor Heggarty advised of difficulties in recruiting to widening participation targets and referenced Professor Gibson's report on people with learning difficulties entering university. Members noted that many learners may not wish to declare their concerns.

## **GB/3/25/16 STUDENT PRESIDENT REPORT**

3/25/16 Miss Martin spoke to a successful Graduation Ceremony and Ball, and advised on preparations taking place over the summer months to ease learners' transition to Stranmillis life, including a Freshers' Magazine and residential activities. She advised on the Christian Union commencement service.

Miss Martin advised that the Student Executive welcomed 20 international students to campus and has helped settle them into campus life in Belfast through a range of social and practical events.

Miss Martin advised that this year's pantomime will be 'Shrek' and reported good relations with teaching union representatives, with discussions underway to partner for mutually beneficial opportunities.

## **GB/3/25/17 GOVERNANCE REVIEW**

**3/25/17.1 Standing Orders**

**3/25/17.2 Operating Framework**

**3/25/17.3 Corporate Governance Framework**

**3/25/17.4 Effectiveness Action Plan**

Governors approved updates to their Standing Orders and Operating Framework and agreed the new Corporate Governance Framework.

Members noted progress against the Governance Effectiveness Action Plan.

Mr Jardine thanked the Secretary for the work undertaken to update the governance documentation.

## **GB/3/25/18 REGISTER OF INTEREST**

3/25/18 In accordance with Schedule 3 of the Instrument of Government, Members conducted their annual review of the Register of Interest.

## **GB/3/25/19 ANNUAL REVIEW OF CUC COMPLIANCE**

3/25/19 Members reviewed the paper assessing governance practice against the key elements of the Committee for University Chairs (CUC) Higher

Education Code of Practice and concluded that they are substantially compliant with all six elements of the Code.

Mr Jardine referred Members to the Accounts Direction for Higher Education Institutions for the 2024-2025 Financial Statements and to the Statement for Recommended Practice (SORP).

Members noted that a 2026 SORP is in development and nearing completion.

#### **GB/3/25/20 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

3/25/10 Mr Jardine advised that his tenure as Chair of the Governing Body is due to expire in December 2025. He informed the meeting that he has agreed with the Department to serve a partial second term as Chair until a competition can be completed in 2027. Members were informed that the competition will further address current and upcoming vacancies that will arise.

Mr Jardine reminded Members to return their annual appraisals.

He informed Members that Mr Mark Lee is moving on for a period on temporary promotion, and Mr Graham Miller is acting as Director of Higher Education.

Mr Jardine advised on upcoming engagements including the DfE Corporate Engagement event on 25 September, Chaplain's lunch on 10 October, College Open Day on 22 October and QUB luncheon on 19 November. Ms Leitch and Dr Boyce confirmed their intention to attend the Learning Environment Conference on 5 November.

#### **GB/3/25/21 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

3/25/21 None to report.

#### **DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 15.00 on Wednesday 26 November 2025 in the Boardroom, Main Building.

There being no other business, the standard meeting concluded at 16.46.

**Signed**

**signature redacted**

**Date**

*26 November 2025*

Minutes of reserved business are included in a separate document.