

**MINUTES OF STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S GOVERNING BODY
MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 25 JUNE 2025 AT 15:00
IN THE BOARDROOM, MAIN BUILDING**

Present: Mr Edgar Jardine (Chair), Dr Lavinia Boyce, Dr Andrew Brown (Teaching Staff Governor), Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Aaron Diver, Mr Robert Drennan, 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 & Development) and Ms Jo O'Boyle (Head of Finance).

Secretariat: Miss Lindsay Armstrong.

The meeting commenced at 15.07.

GB/2/25/1 INTRODUCTIONS

2/25/1.1 The Chairman welcomed all attendees and acknowledged the extensive agenda.

2/25/1.2 Mr Jardine extended a warm welcome to Miss Martin, attending her first Governing Body meeting in her official capacity as Student President.

GB/2/25/2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2/25/2 Apologies for absence were received from Dr Maureen Bennett and Mr Peter Weil.

GB/2/25/3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

2/25/3 No declarations of interest were received.

GB/2/25/4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

2/25/4 No additional business was raised.

GB/2/25/5 MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD 26 MARCH 2025

2/25/5.1 The minutes of the meeting on 26 March 2025 were approved as an accurate record on proposal from Dr Boyce and seconded by Ms Leitch.

Matters arising

2/25/5.2 Members noted the infographic summarising the Annual Report.

GB/2/25/6 COMMITTEE BUSINESS

Overview of the HR & Remuneration meeting 28 May 2025

2/25/6.1 Dr Boyce provided a summary of the key discussions at the HR and Remuneration Committee held on 28 May 2025. She reported that nine recruitment exercises were conducted between 1 March 2025 and 30 April 2025, with 84% of staff recording no sickness absence since the last reporting period. Dr Boyce noted that occupational sick pay for March and April 2025 was £14,892.

Dr Boyce reported on the development of a Staff Code of Conduct and Staff Charter, and advised that in light of underutilisation of Governing Body training throughout the academic year, Members agreed to reduce the 2025-2026 training budget to £2k.

Overview of the Education meeting 4 June 2025

2/25/6.2 In the absence of the Committee Chair, Mrs Scott provided an overview on recent engagements.

She reported that Members had met with the Visiting Professors on 2 May 2025, where discussions focused on workforce strategy, teacher retention, the quality of early years' provision and the need for statistical analysis.

Mrs Scott advised that on 4 June 2025, Members met with Ms Linsey Farrell, Deputy Secretary for Education Policy for a candid discussion on the TransformED agenda, with attendees expressing a willingness to continue engagement.

Mrs Scott further advised that Dr Bell attended the meeting to present an overview of STEM activities.

Mrs Leitch referenced the launch of the TransformED agenda on 3 June 2025, and raised concerns about the sustainability of positive perceptions of Initial Teacher Training in Northern Ireland, citing issues with quality assurance and financial incentives linked to unregulated online provision.

Mr Jardine confirmed that quality assurance concerns were raised at the recent Accountability meeting, and emphasised the importance of a coherent workforce strategy.

Overview of the Finance & General Purposes meeting 11 June 2025

2/25/6.3 Mr Diver advised on discussions taking place at the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 11 June 2025.

He reported a current positive financial position while acknowledging forthcoming challenges, and confirmed that policy approvals had been granted to the Strategy, Policy and Procedure policy, Anti-Money Laundering policy, Treasury Management policy, Health and Safety policy, Procurement policy and Cyber policy and Strategy.

Mr Diver confirmed that the Committee noted ongoing recruitment difficulties within hospitality, accommodation and catering (HACS) and emphasised the importance of a robust induction process for the incoming Head. He advised that Members also reviewed capital projects and budget stream variances.

Overview of Audit & Risk Assurance 25 June 2025

2/25/6.4 Mr Snodden reported that the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee had earlier welcomed the new External Auditor and approved the Internal Audit Plan 2025-2026.

He noted the addition of two new risks to the Corporate Risk Register;

- Risk 10: *Failure to accurately complete the 24056 Student HESA return by the statutory deadline*, identified as an operational pressure, and
- Risk 11: *Failure to recruit student numbers at Levels 4, 5 and 6*, attributed to increased competition.

Mr Snodden confirmed that a review of Direct Award Contracts had been undertaken.

Mr Snodden advised that Members were satisfied that the Annual Accounts would be approved without qualification.

GB/2/25/7 ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE MINUTES

2/25/7.1 **Finance & General Purposes 26 February 2025**

2/25/7.2 **Finance & General Purposes 11 April 2025**

2/25/7.3 **Education 5 March 2025**

2/25/7.4 **HR & Remuneration 12 March 2025**

2/25/7.5 **Audit & Risk Assurance 19 March 2025**

On proposal from Mr Diver and seconded by Mrs Leitch, Members formally adopted the five approved Committee minutes.

Mr De Largy and Ms O'Boyle arrived at the meeting at 15.24.

GB/2/25/8 FINANCE PAPER**Management Accounts**

2/25/8 Ms O'Boyle presented the April 2025 Management Accounts reporting total income of £11,158k, £299k ahead of budget while total spend is £10,387k, £57k ahead of budget. She noted that non-staff costs exceeded budget by £175k, while staff costs were under budget by £118k.

She advised that this has resulted in a reported surplus of £871k, compared to a budgeted surplus of £628k. Ms O'Boyle noted that the equivalent variance at April 2024 was £603k.

She relayed certain concerns relating to accurately predicting HACS income and maintenance and repairs costs, and spoke to a busy period for the finance team.

In response to a query from Mr Jardine, Ms O'Boyle commented on the appeal of pursuing education through Skill Up funding. Mr Feely clarified the eligibility criteria, and noted that 400 requests for application have been received.

Professor Heggarty advised that engagement meetings are planned over the summer months, with Members acknowledging SUC's strong reputation for delivering high quality teacher training.

Ms Corrigan arrived at the meeting at 15.42.

Ms O'Boyle reported a capital funding shortfall of approximately £1m, resulting in the inability to progress several projects including minor works, library requirements and upgrades to the CCTV system. She advised that cash holdings stood at £5.7m at the end of April 2025, currently earning 3.75% interest with Danske Bank.

GB/2/25/9 DRAFT BUDGET 2025-2026

2/25/9 Ms O'Boyle presented the draft budget for the year ending 31 July 2026 and reported on a small surplus of £1k prior to the allocation of project funds. She outlined the underlying assumptions, ongoing discussions to increase research income, and noted that no additional funding has been indicated to offset employers' national insurance contributions or cost of living pressures.

Dr Brown left the meeting at 15.53 and returned at 15.57.

Ms O'Boyle highlighted the ambition to increase international student enrolment, noted the success of Turing projects and outlined performance targets set for HACS. Mr De Largy advised on

development opportunities linked to the enhancement of the sports pitches.

Mr Jardine, acknowledging that this was Ms O'Boyle's final presentation to the Governing Body, expressed his appreciation for her contributions. As former Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, he commended the clarity and detail of the financial reports she had provided.

On behalf of staff, Professor Heggarty acknowledged the significant contribution of Ms O'Boyle to all aspects of College life and extended best wishes to her in early retirement.

Ms O'Boyle left the meeting at 16.05.

GB/2/25/13 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT

2/25/13.1 Professor Heggarty presented the Principal's report providing updates on student places and the 2025-2026 draft budget, challenges in Higher Education funding, progress on the TransformED agenda and ongoing collaboration with the Early Years Organisation.

Draft 3-Year Corporate Plan

2/25/13.2 Professor Heggarty advised that the University College is currently consulting with staff, trade unions and students on the 2025-2028 Corporate Plan, with a final draft scheduled for Governing Body approval in September 2025. He advised that the development of a longer-term internal 10-year is planned for Autumn 2025.

Professor Heggarty also advised that, following recommendation from Innovation and Consultancy Services, the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) have been reviewed with the aim of making the published version more relevant. He highlighted key achievements, including student success and progression exceeding 94%, 94% of KPIs achieved or substantially achieved, the introduction of a Doctorate programme, delivery of Skill Up and other initiatives, a successful Queens University Belfast (QUB) periodic review, high National Student Survey satisfaction rates, implementation of a staff wellbeing programme and engagement forum, reduced energy usage, new agreements with QUB and the Department for the Economy (DfE), and notable contributions to research and scholarship.

Professor Heggarty outlined key challenges facing the University College, including funding pressures, pay awards and recruitment difficulties. He referenced DfE's four economic priorities, the *A Fair Start* initiative, the Independent Review of Education, the SEN Reform and Delivery Plan, and the TransformED agenda as significant contextual factors.

Mr Feely left the meeting at 16.13 and returned at 16.15.

Professor Heggarty proposed that the current vision, mission and values be retained, with a reduction in objectives and consolidation of performance indicators.

He outlined the approach to monitoring, reporting and next steps. Discussion took place regarding appropriate alignment to relevant policy.

Mrs Miller left the meeting at 16.37.

Discussions taking place between 16.45 and 17.25 are contained within reserved business minutes.

Mr Diver left the meeting at 17.00. Ms Nic Eoin exited the meeting at 17.24.

GB/2/25/10 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE

2/25/10 Mr De Largy referred Members to the papers, noting a positive report and confirming that all statutory requirements are currently up to date.

Dr Brown left the meeting at 17.26.

GB/2/25/11 ANNUAL BUSINESS PLAN KPI PROGRESS REPORT

2/25/11 Professor Heggarty referred to the KPIs and outcomes, highlighting that the College was unable to meet recruitment targets for widening participation.

GB/2/25/12 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER

2/25/12 Professor Heggarty highlighted two additional risks to the Corporate Risk Register;

- Risk 10: *Failure to accurately complete the 24056 Student HESA return by the statutory deadline*, identified as an operational pressure, and
- Risk 11: *Failure to recruit student numbers at Levels 4, 5 and 6*, attributed to increased competition.

He noted that all Higher Education Institutions in Northern Ireland missed the statutory deadline for last year's submission and outlined planned mitigations to support Registry colleagues with data entry.

In relation to increased competition, Members recommended that the Principal write formally to DfE to raise their concerns.

Mr Drennan departed the meeting at 17.29.

GB/2/25/14 STUDENT PRESIDENT'S REPORT

2/25/14 Miss Martin reported on a range of events and activities attended by the Students' Union Executive, and confirmed that initial meetings had taken place with representatives from QUB and St. Mary's Students' Union to begin drafting a partnership agreement.

She advised that over £20k has been raised during the academic year for the three nominated charities.

An overview on clubs and societies events was provided, and Members were informed that the Graduation Ball is scheduled for 1 July 2025.

GB/2/25/15 GOVERNANCE EFFECTIVENESS ACTION PLAN

2/25/15 Mr Jardine referred Members to the Governance Effectiveness Action Plan, outlining the recommendations arising from reviews, designated responsible owners and target completion dates. Members approved the Action Plan.

GB/2/25/16 GOVERNING BODY AND COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE 2025-2026

2/25/16 Members endorsed the proposed meeting schedule, noting an amendment to the HR and Remuneration date as agreed by Members.

GB/2/25/17 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

2/25/17 The Chair noted the passing of Governor Wilma Fee on 3 May 2025, and acknowledged her distinguished 40-year career in education, including service at Ulster University and Queens University Belfast.

Members formally accepted the resignation of Mr Peter Weil and thanked him for his service.

The Chair reminded Members to complete and return their Register of Interests and Insurance Template to the Secretary

Mr Jardine reminded Members of the Summer Graduation events scheduled for 30 June.

He reported that the University College held its annual Accountability meeting on 17 June, during which matters of governance, financial challenges, corporate planning, new programme development, quality assurance, staffing issues, and ongoing collaboration were discussed.

He advised that updates were also provided on estate maintenance, and future strategic considerations, including the College's Non-Departmental Public Body status and capital planning.

GB/2/25/18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

2/25/18 None to report.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 15.00 on Wednesday 24 September.

There being no other business, the standard meeting concluded at 17.40.

Signed signature redacted **Date** 24/09/2025

Minutes of reserved business are included in a separate document.