

**MINUTES OF STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S GOVERNING BODY  
MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 26 MARCH 2025 AT 15:00  
IN THE BOARDROOM, MAIN BUILDING**

**Present:** Mr Edgar Jardine (Chair), Dr Maureen Bennett, Dr Lavinia Boyce, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Robert Drennan, Mr Darren Feely (Support Staff Governor), Professor Jonathan Heggarty (Principal / Chief Executive), Mr Andrew Irwin (Student Governor), Ms Paula Leitch, Mrs Heather Miller, Ms Kim Scott, Mr Sam Snodden and Mr Peter Weil.

**In Attendance:** Mr Raymond De Largy (Director of Corporate Services & Development), Ms Jo O'Boyle (Head of Finance) and Miss Jessica Martin (Student President Elect 2025-2026).

**Secretariat:** Miss Lindsay Armstrong.

The meeting commenced at 15.00.

**GB/1/25/1 INTRODUCTION**

- 1/25/1.1 The Chairman welcomed all parties to the meeting and proposed altering the running order of the agenda to allow for attendees to address other business needs and recuse themselves for sections of the meeting.
- 1/25/1.2 Mr Jardine welcomed Mr Snodden to the meeting following a period of convalescence.
- 1/25/1.3 He congratulated Miss Martin on her election as Student President 2025-2026 and noted that it is Mr Irwin's last Governing Body meeting as Student Governor.
- 1/25/1.4 Mr Jardine noted that Professor Ken Gibson would be retiring from the University College on 30 April and Mrs Claire Kerr will commence employment on 1 April.
- 1/25/1.5 Condolences were expressed to Mr Diver on the passing of his father and to Chaplain, Reverend Nigel Craig on the recent passing of his wife, Antonia.
- 1/25/1.6 On proposal from Mrs Miller and seconded by Mr Snodden, Members ratified the appointment of Cavanagh Kelly, External Auditors. Mr De Largy spoke to a successful tender process.
- 1/25/1.7 Mr Jardine commented on successful College events since the last meeting, including the Celebration of Words and Music on 12 December, the Eàmon Phoenix Memorial Service on 29 January, the signing of the Memorandum of Agreement with Queens University on 3 March and advised on the DfE Partnership Engagement events on

20 January and 19 March. The Secretary confirmed that the slides of the meeting have been circulated to Members.

1/25/1.8 Mr Jardine confirmed that he, Dr Boyce and Ms Leitch have confirmed their attendance at the NI Leadership and Governance Conference on 2 April 2025.

1/25/1.9 Reserved business.

1/25/1.10 Mr Jardine extended his thanks to Ms Corrigan for acting as Chair of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee during Mr Snodden's period of recuperation.

#### **GB/1/25/5 MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD 27 NOVEMBER 2024**

1/25/5.1 The minutes of the meeting on 27 November 2024 were approved as an accurate record on proposal from Dr Boyce and seconded by Ms Leitch.

#### **Matters arising**

1/25/5.2 Miss Armstrong advised that five of the six items on the action sheet have been closed out and the remaining action is on target for completion.

#### **GB/1/25/2 APOLIGIES FOR ABSENCE**

1/25/2 Apologies for absence were received from Dr Andy Brown, Mr Aaron Diver, Ms Wilma Fee and Ms Una Nic Eoin.

#### **GB/1/25/3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

1/25/3 No declarations of interest were received.

#### **GB/1/25/4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

1/25/4 No additional business was raised.

#### **GB/1/25/12 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

1/25/12.1 Professor Heggarty referred Members to the Principal's report and advised that on 11 February 2025, staff and students gathered outside the Refectory Building to remember Katya Watson, a much-loved second year student on the Early Childhood Studies programme who had passed away just over a year ago.

Professor Heggarty advised that a tree has been planted in Katya's memory and words of consideration and appreciation were spoken by the Principal and staff members, and a personal reflection by one of

Katya's classmates was read. Members were informed that a plaque is situated next to the tree in Katya's memory.

1/25/12.2 Professor Heggarty relayed conversations he and colleagues had with the Department of the Economy on 28 February regarding anticipated budget pressures. He informed that the final budget has not yet been signed off by the Minister and spoke to pressures, including an increase in National Insurance, pension pressures and rising inflation. Members were advised that HE has fallen behind other education sectors in terms of pay increases in recent years and is one of the few sectors where pay is not regularly baselined in the budget.

1/25/12.3 Professor Heggarty informed on the delay on approvals to update the three key external quality assurance mechanisms.

1/25/12.4 The Principal informed that student recruitment is presenting strong however cautioned that there has been a downturn in applications for PGCE. He advised that this is almost certainly a consequence to remote international PGCEs being introduced by English Universities, which are uncapped, yet funded by DfE and recognised by the Department of Education.

In response to a query from Ms Leitch, Members were advised that the University College is not permitted to offer part-time PGCE.

Mr Feely spoke to a healthy student application and interview process.

RB/1/25/21 Discussions taking place during 15.36 and 15.58 are contained within the reserved minutes.

Professor Heggarty left the meeting at 15.58.

## **GB/1/25/6 COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

### **Overview of Finance & General Purposes meeting 26 February 2025**

1/25/6.1 Mr De Lary commented that the tabled draft minutes represent an accurate account of discussions taking place at the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 26 February 2025.

### **Overview of Education meeting 5 March 2025**

1/25/6.2 Dr Bennett provided a summary of business conducted at the Education Committee meeting on 5 March 2025. She advised that presentations from Principal Lecturers are to be rotated and a suggestion was made to meet with the Visiting Professors. She spoke to comprehensive Directors reports and a request for feedback on how the College has responded to consultations.

Ms Scott commented that a query was raised regarding the appropriateness of Governors writing to DE on the subject of part-time PGCE.

Members acknowledged that representatives from DE have been invited to attend the June Education Committee meeting and noted that engagement is likely to focus on the TransformEd NI agenda.

Governors discussed the difficulties in schools recruiting and retaining Maths and Science teachers.

### **Overview of HR & Remuneration meeting 12 March 2025**

1/25/6.3 Dr Boyce reported on discussions taking place at the HR and Remuneration Committee meeting on 12 March 2025 and congratulated Mr Feely on being appointed for a second term as Support Staff Governor.

Dr Boyce confirmed that Members had reviewed the Staffing Report for the period 1 October 2024 to 28 February 2025, noting that nineteen recruitment exercises were undertaken during that time. She informed that, in addition, five agency staff were recruited and that 70% of staff had no sickness absence during the quarter.

Dr Boyce reported that feedback has been positive from HACS staff transitioning from term-time to 52 week contracts and advised that Members had approved two policies following a rigorous consultation process.

Mr Jardine advised that during the interview appointment process for the new Director of Student Services and Wellbeing, applicants had commented on how well they were received onto campus. Ms Leitch commented that appropriate staff should rightly be congratulated for their professionalism.

### **Overview of Audit & Risk Assurance 19 March 2025**

1/25/6.4 Ms Corrigan referred Members to the circulated draft minutes of 19 March 2025 and advised that ARAC Members expressed pleasure that work on the upgrade of the Sports Pitches has commenced.

Ms Corrigan referred to the Internal Audit reports discussed and recommendations arising, and confirmed that the Internal Auditors SCC are in the second year of a four-year contract.

She advised that the Committee discussed the annual Fraud report, the bi-annual National Fraud Initiative and cyber awareness

### **GB/1/25/7 ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

1/25/7.1	<b>HR &amp; Remuneration 30 October 2024</b>
1/25/7.2	<b>Education 6 November 2024</b>
1/25/7.3	<b>Finance &amp; General Purposes 13 November 2024</b>
1/25/7.4	<b>Audit &amp; Risk Assurance 20 November 2024</b>
1/25/7.5	<b>Audit &amp; Risk Assurance 15 January 2025</b>

Governors adopted the five approved Committee minutes.

Ms O'Boyle arrived at the meeting at 16.29.

#### **GB/1/25/8 FINANCE PAPER**

1/25/8 Ms O'Boyle referred Members to the February 2025 Management Accounts and associated commentary. She advised that the latest accounts report a surplus of £516k compared to a budgeted surplus of £355k, a positive variance of £161k.

Ms O'Boyle reported on uncertainty around levels of income and expenditure, specifically in relation to repairs and maintenance.

Members were advised that the annual reforecasting exercise is currently underway and two bids out of a total of 12, have been approved. Ms O'Boyle informed that the other bids are being kept under consideration and decisions will be reached closer to year end.

Professor Heggarty returned to the meeting at 16.32.

In response to a query from Mr Jardine, Ms O'Boyle advised on a difficulty of accurately predicting Halls occupancy.

Ms O'Boyle was thanked for her report and she left the meeting at 16.34.

#### **GB/1/25/9 HEALTH AND SAFETY UPDATE**

1/25/9 Mr De Largy referred Members to the Health and Safety paper detailing a commendable number of first aiders on campus. He informed on training undertaken, accident and incidents recorded and staff wellbeing initiatives.

Mr De Largy advised that work on the Sports Pitches is largely on schedule and referred to the memorandum issued to staff and students regarding considerations for personal safety whilst building works are ongoing.

#### **GB/1/25/10 ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

5/24/10 Professor Heggarty referred Members to the 2023-2024 Annual Report and advised that the document aligns with the College's corporate aims.

Mr Jardine commented that he was impressed by the breadth of work undertaken by the Marketing team and suggested that consideration should be given to inviting them to a future meeting of the Governing Body.

#### **GB/1/25/11 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER**

1/25/11 Professor Heggarty referred Members to the Corporate Risk Register. He advised that the tabled paper reflects the March 2025 position and the main change relates to the removal of Risk 9; Failure to agree an appropriate MoA / Partnership Agreement with QUB which supports the academic, research and commercial aspirations of the University College.

#### **GB/1/25/13 STUDENT PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

1/25/13.1 Mr Irwin presented the Student President's report and acknowledged it is his last Governing Body meeting as outgoing Student Governor. He thanked all parties for their warm welcome and advised that the insight into the workings of the institution has been invaluable.

Mr Irwin provided an update on Student Union activities, and advised on the creation of 'placement communities'. He reported on clubs and societies activities, commenting specifically on the success of the Pantomime.

Mr Irwin reported that there was a record number of nominations and a successful voting rate for the Student Union elections. He congratulated Miss Martin on her success in being appointed Student President 2025-2026 and having secured 95% of the votes.

Mr Irwin thanked Professors Gibson and Heggarty, and Mr De Largy for their guidance over the year.

1/25/13.2 Mr Irwin tabled an extract for the SU Constitution for Governing Body approval which detailed the procedure for the Student President's payroll. All Members indicated that they were content to endorse the proposal.

On behalf of College Management, Professor Heggarty thanked Mr Irwin for his professionalism and dedication in his role as Student President, and welcomed Miss Martin to the important position.

#### **GB/1/25/14 GOVERNING BODY EFFECTIVENESS IMPLEMENTATION PLAN**

1/25/14 Mr Jardine presented the paper detailing his, the Principal's and the Secretary's findings to the recommendations contained in the reports presented to the Governing Body at their meeting on 27 November 2024. He advised that Members' interpretation and acceptance of the recommendations arising from the positive externally facilitated

Governing Body Effectiveness Review and the Innovation and Consultancy Services (ICS), Arm-Length Body Review of Stranmillis University College, will form the baseline for future effectiveness reviews.

Regarding the ICS's recommendation to create a dashboard, Mr De Largy advised that the College is actively building a Power Bi dashboard to offer a concise, 'at a glance' view of the College's performance, driven by core, high-level KPIs.

Further to a query from Ms Scott and Dr Bennett, Mr De Largy informed on a challenge to provide accurate in-year student outcome figures, advising that quantifiable data is not readily available.

Ms Leitch recommended a rewording to the Panel's advice on Priority 4 of the Effectiveness Review on engagement with external partners.

Further to the minor recommendations, all Members indicated that they were content with the Panel's findings on the recommendations.

## **GB/1/25/15 GOVERNING BODY AND COMMITTEE MEETING SCHEDULE 2025-2026**

### **Core Programme of Work**

1/25/15 Members were presented with the proposed 2025-2026 Governing Body and Committee meetings schedule detailing the standing agenda items per meeting.

Members noted that the meeting plan follows a similar format to previous years and were asked to inform the Secretary if they have any difficulties accommodating any of the dates.

## **GB/1/25/16 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

1/25/16 Members approved formal sign off on the Partnership Agreement between SUC and DfE.

## **GB/1/25/17 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

1/25/17 The Chair had no additional business to communicate.

## **GB/1/25/18 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

1/25/18 Members noted the Programme for Government 2024-2027; Our Plan, Doing What Matters Most, published 3 March 2025 and the Transformed NI, published 11 March 2025, available within the Common Materials folder in the dedicated Governance SharePoint site.

There being no other business, the meeting concluded at 17.02.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 15.00 on Wednesday 25 June 2025 in the Boardroom, Main Building.

Signed \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
**CHAIR**

Minutes of reserved business are included in a separate document.