

**MINUTES OF STRANMILLIS UNIVERSITY COLLEGE'S GOVERNING BODY  
MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER 2024 AT 15:00  
IN BOARDROOM, MAIN BUILDING**

**Present:** Mr Edgar Jardine (Chair), Dr Maureen Bennett, Dr Andy Brown (Staff Governor), Dr Lavinia Boyce, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Aaron Diver, Mr Robert Drennan, Professor Jonathan Heggarty (Principal / Chief Executive), Mr Andrew Irwin (Student Governor), Ms Paula Leitch, Ms Una Nic Eoin, Ms Kim Scott and Mr Sam Snodden.

**In Attendance:** Mr Raymond De Largy (Director of Corporate Services & Development), Ms Jo O'Boyle (Head of Finance) and Professor Ken Gibson (Director of Student Support & Learning Services).

**Secretariat:** Miss Lindsay Armstrong.

The meeting commenced at 15.03.

**GB/5/24/1 INTRODUCTIONS**

5/24/1 The Chairman welcomed all parties to the meeting. Having noted the substantial agenda, he advised that all papers would be taken as read although if Members have questions on a paper they should feel free to ask.

**GB/5/24/2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

5/24/2 Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Wilma Fee, Mr Darren Feely, Ms Heather Miller and Mr Peter Weil.

**GB/5/24/3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

5/24/3 No declarations of interest were received.

**GB/5/24/4 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

5/24/4 No additional business was raised.

**GB/5/24/5 MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD 25 SEPTEMBER 2024**

5/24/5.1 The minutes of the meeting on 25 September 2024 were approved as an accurate record on proposal from Mr Snodden and seconded by Dr Boyce.

**Matters arising**

5/24/5.2 Miss Armstrong advised that three of the five items on the action sheet have been closed out and the others are on target.

Professor Heggarty stated that consultation on the new 3-year and 10-year Corporate Plans will commence in the New Year. He advised that it was anticipated that the final draft will be presented to the full Governing Body in September 2025.

Mr Jardine commented that the plan will need to address longer-term Capital Projects.

## **GB/5/24/6 COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

Mr Jardine invited Committee Chairs to provide an update to discussions taking place at recent meetings.

### **Overview of HR & Remuneration meeting 30 October 2024**

5/24/6.1 Dr Boyce provided an overview of discussions taking place at the HR and Remuneration Committee meeting on 30 October 2024. She advised that there is approximately £4.5k remaining in the 2024-2025 Governor training budget and that the Secretary had recently undertaken an analysis of the collation of Members self-assessed skills audit. She informed that no concerns are being raised about absent knowledge or competencies on the Governing Board.

Dr Boyce advised that Committee Members noted there had been 19 recruitment exercises within the period from May to July with an average of 9.3 applicants per exercise. She said that 8 agency staff were recruited costing £107k and that there is still a difficulty recruiting staff for HACS. Members noted that agency costs are approximately 20% higher than appointing permanent staff.

Dr Boyce advised that sickness absence has decreased and 81% of employees had no sickness absence in the quarter. She informed of the recent launch of the Staff Wellbeing Planner and Equality Hub.

Dr Boyce advised on difficulties in the completion of staff appraisals during a period of Action Short of Strike and informed that approximately 63% of appraisals have since been finalised.

Dr Boyce advised that Committee Members reviewed the HR Risk Register and noted that an examination of policies is to take place to ensure compliance with the proposed Good Jobs Employment Rights and Domestic Violence Bill. She commented that Members had reviewed the HR Business Plan.

### **Overview of Education meeting 6 November 2024**

5/24/6.2 Dr Bennett provided a summary of business conducted at the Education Committee meeting on 6 November 2024. She advised that Members had welcomed Dr McDade and Ms Geldenhys who provided an update on International Activity and commented on the Committee's

wish to engage with a wide range of staff regarding their specialist business unit.

Dr Bennett advised that Members were provided with an update on the Doctorate programme and provided their endorsement for several approvals to be escalated to the Board. She informed on the continuation of provision under Skill Up funding.

Dr Bennett reminded Members of the follow on meeting with officials from the Department of Education and Department for the Economy.

### **Overview of Finance & General Purposes meeting 13 November 2024**

5/24/6.3 Mr Jardine, who had stood in as Chair in Mr Diver's absence, reported on discussions taking place at the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting on 13 November 2024. He advised on plans to conduct a detailed cash flow forecast, with market testing for best interest rates, to consider how to best invest surplus funds.

Mr Jardine commented that following reports that Fanum House is to be demolished as part of a student housing scheme, it may be prudent to consider the increasing competition from the private sector which might indicate a need to refresh Stran Halls.

Members were advised on the upcoming appointment of a Main Contractor for the Sports Pitches project and informed that the Education Authority's considerations for the Henry Garrett building is no longer progressing. Mr Jardine noted that a substantive Capital Works programme is being taken forward.

Mr Jardine confirmed that the Committee had approved the Financial Regulations policy, and as such, was advising the Governing Body accordingly.

### **Overview of Audit & Risk Assurance 20 November 2024**

5/24/6.4 Mr Snodden referred Members to the draft minutes of the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee meeting on 20 November 2024. He advised that Members had considered the Annual Report and Financial Statements and were content with controls in place. He thanked all staff for their input.

In response to a query from Ms Scott regarding Direct Awards Contracts, Mr Snodden advised on the accounting extension and confirmed that all DACs are approved through the Construction and Procurement Delivery unit.

Professor Heggarty advised that the award of DACs is not an unusual practice and is well documented. He anticipated that a new finance system may support the HR function.

## **GB/5/24/7 ADOPTION OF COMMITTEE MINUTES**

5/24/7.1	<b>HR &amp; Remuneration 15 May 2024</b>
5/24/7.2	<b>Education 5 June 2024</b>
5/24/7.3	<b>Education 3 July 2024</b>
5/24/7.4	<b>Finance &amp; General Purposes 18 September 2024</b>
5/24/7.5	<b>Audit &amp; Risk Assurance 19 June 2024</b>

Governors adopted the five approved Committee minutes.

## **GB/5/24/8 HR COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATION**

### **New post – Academic Office Administration Officer**

Dr Boyce set out the rationale for the new post in terms of succession planning and support required for the new Doctorate programme, and advised that the requirement for administrative assistance is likely to increase as the provision increases on year. She informed Members of the associated costs.

Professor Heggarty clarified that it is anticipated that the Doctorate programme will ultimately be sufficient to cover the additional costs and the initial investment is to cover a shortfall in associated costs for the first two years.

Dr Brown commented that placements, which fall to this team, are core to teaching and learning success.

Governors endorsed the proposals.

Mr De Largy, Ms Corrigan and Ms O’Boyle were welcomed to the meeting at 15.26.

## **GB/5/24/9 FINANCE PAPER**

5/24/9.1	Ms O’Boyle presented the Finance report and advised that the recently received 2024-2025 Recurrent Grant Funding letter is broadly in line with budget and expectations.
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She advised on Capital Grant funding, confirming that the tender for the Sports Pitches is on track and other projects are well advanced.

Ms O’Boyle advised on appropriate budget reallocations, including that an additional £150k has been identified with £75k allocated to address general building repairs and maintenance and £75k allocated to address staffing costs and flexibility.

5/24/9.2 **Management Accounts September 2024**

Ms O'Boyle referred Members to the Management Accounts and informed that total income at September 2024 of £1,151k is £12k behind budget and advised on the reasons for income variances.

She noted anticipated additional resources and confirmed that the finance team will reforecast appropriately.

Dr Bennett commented on the unusual increase in non-returning students.

Mr Drennan arrived at the meeting at 15.32.

Professor Heggarty advised on agreed protocols with the four NI HEIs. Discussion took place regarding aggregation of student numbers, paid placements and competition with mainland providers.

**GB/5/24/10 AUDIT & RISK ASSURANCE COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2023-2024**

5/24/10.1 Mr Snodden referred Members to the 2023-2024 Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Annual Report detailing the range of work undertaken throughout the year. He advised that the report will be included with the accountability returns to the Sponsor Department.

**GB/5/24/11 FINANCIAL STATEMENTS**

**External Auditors Audit Findings Report  
Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024  
Letter of Representation**

5/24/11.1 Ms O'Boyle referred Members to the full finalised Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024 and supporting documentation. She advised that the Annual Accounts have been reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Audit and Risk Assurance Committee and there have been no changes.

Ms O'Boyle referred Members to the key highlights, advising on the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure.

5/24/11.2 Mr De Largy advised on the considerations of the Salary Working Group and the impact of increased employers' contribution. He informed that updates are provided through HR and Remuneration Committee reports.

Members unanimously approved the Accounts on proposal from Dr Boyce and seconded by Mrs Leitch. The submissions were duly signed by the Principal and Accounting Officer and the Chair of the Governing Body, as required.

A comfort break was called between 15.49 and 15.55.

Mr De Largy and Ms O'Boyle left the meeting at 15.55.

## **GB/5/24/12 PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

### **Quality Assurance Concordat Annual Submission / Careers Research Submission**

4/24/12.1 Professor Heggarty referred Members to the annual assurance statements and advised that they have previously been approved by Members of the Education Committee.

He informed that the Quality Assurance provides the Department with comfort regarding the continuous improvement of the student academic experience and student outcomes, and the reliability of degree standards.

Members were advised that the Research Statements will be published on the College website.

Professor Gibson arrived at the meeting at 15.58.

### **Minister for Education's Response to The Independent Review of Education**

4/24/12.2 Professor Heggarty reminded Members that the Education Minister, Mr Paul Givan set out his Department's response to the recommendations and findings of the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland on 21 October 2024.

He reminded Governors of the Minister's intent to seek agreement to legislate that all children remain in education or training until they are 18 years old.

Members were informed that a draft report on a review of curriculum is expected March 2025 and a detailed strategy for educational transformation is expected to be published in recent weeks.

All Members endorsed the tabled assurance documentation.

## **GB/5/24/13 CORPORATE RISK REGISTER (CRR)**

5/24/13.1 Professor Heggarty presented the updated Corporate Risk Register and advised that Risk 1, Failure to meet full-time targets, has been closed as the University College has recruited to ITE numbers and slightly increased non-ITE enrolments.

Professor Heggarty confirmed that there has been no movement in relation to Risks 2 to 8.

He advised that the residual risk has reduced slightly in regard to Risk 9 as the Memorandum of Agreement with Queens University Belfast is being progressed.

Mr Snodden advised that ARAC Members recently conducted a full review of the CRR and no concerns were raised.

## **GB/5/24/14 STUDENT PRESIDENT'S REPORT**

5/24/14.1 Mr Irwin presented the Student President's Report detailing a wide and varied range of events. The Union had sponsored a variety of well-attended events including Fresher's Week, Step Up, Speak Out Week and International Week.

Mr Irwin advised that the Student Union support three chosen charities namely Children in Crossfire, Made for More and Simon Community NI. He advised that a staggering £19,173 was raised as part of efforts for Charity Week.

Members were appraised of fundraising activities including a sleep out, 'Stranded', 'Off the Charts' and 'Stran Does Strictly'.

### **Students Union Constitution Student Union Laws & Schedule**

5/24/14.2 Mr Irwin referred Members to minor recommended amendments to the SU Constitution and Laws and Schedules.

The changes were approved by Members of the Governing Body.

### **Students Union Accounts**

5/24/14.3 Professor Gibson referred Members to the SU Annual Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2024. He advised that Moore (NI) LLP have independently examined the Accounts and are satisfied with the findings.

Professor Gibson spoke to a good year and thanked SUC for the grant to help fund events expenditure, international outreach, clubs and societies and general expenses. He advised that monies raised from the yearly Pantomime are reinvested into the Student Union.

Professor Gibson commented on a difficulty in building up reserves due to the cost of living rises and a commitment to support the student experience.

Members commented favourably on the work of the Union and recommended they explore avenues for marketing the successful events.

Members instructed Professor Gibson to sign off on the Accounts as an accurate record.

## **GB/5/24/15 GOVERNING BODY EFFECTIVENESS REVIEW**

5/24/15.1 Mr Jardine reminded Members that Mr Nelson had been commissioned to independently facilitate a review of SUC's Governing Body's effectiveness. He commented that it is gratifying to see that the Governing Body meets all six primary elements of the Committee of University Chairs, Higher Education Code of Governance framework.

Members noted the comprehensive report and recommendations and commented that it would be prudent to agree actions and thereafter develop an implementation plan. The Chair, Professor Heggarty and the Secretary to the GB will take the lead on reviewing and prioritising the recommendations.

It was agreed that a paper would be brought to the next Board meeting.

## **GB/5/24/16 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

5/24/16.1 Professor Heggarty advised that all NI HEIs are entering into a Partnership Agreement with the Sponsor Department and the documentation is intended to replace the current Management Statement / Financial Memorandum.

Mr Snodden advised that he had conducted a comparison of the documents and noted no significant changes.

## **GB/5/24/17 DRAFT MEMORANDUM OF AGREEMENT / PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT WITH QUEENS UNIVERSITY BELFAST**

5/24/17.1 Professor Heggarty referred Members to the MoA and spoke to a pragmatic relationship with QUB spanning over 100 years.

He advised that the Agreement addresses the enhanced relationship, expands on arbitration and details honorary academic titles.

Mr Jardine thanked all parties for their input and confirmed that official signing of the document will take place early 2025.

Professor Gibson left the meeting at 16.50.

## **GB/5/24/18 CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

5/24/18.1 Mr Jardine advised on the DfE Partnership Event on 10 October 2024 and further engagement planned for 20 January and 24 March 2025.

5/24/18.2 Dr Bennett referred to the extraordinary meeting on 6 November 2024. Governors commented positively on the engagement with DE and DfE

officials and productive discussions on Departmental priorities, workforce planning and special educational needs.

5/24/18.3 Mr Jardine referred to the Chaplain's lunch on 7 November 2024 and the Act of Remembrance on 11 November 2024.

5/24/18.4 He advised that the recruitment process for the Director of Student Services and Wellbeing is underway and it is hoped that interviews can be concluded before the Christmas break.

5/24/18.5 Mr Jardine reminded Members about the Christmas luncheon event on 11 November 2024 and Celebration of Christmas in Words and Music on 12 December 2024. He confirmed that Members are invited to both events and should register their intention to attend.

5/24/18.6 The Chair urged Members to contact the Secretary with any identified training requirements.

5/24/18.7 Professor Heggarty informed that the Eamon Phoenix Memorial Service will take place on 29 January 2025. He advised that an invitation will be extended through the offices of the Secretary.

**GB/5/24/19 ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

5/24/19 There being no other business the meeting concluded at 16.59.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

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

**Signed**

Minutes of reserved business are included in a separate document.