



Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)

held on Tuesday 26th November 2024 at 17:30, Lisburn Campus

Agenda Item 1: Chair’s Business:

a) Attendance and Apologies for Absences:

Present:

Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body), Mr Tommy Martin (Interim Principal/CEO), Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Darren Stewart, Ms Majella Corrigan (Items 3-9 only), Mr Derek Wilson, Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mrs Carolyn King, Mr Michael McQuillan, Dr Danny McConnell, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mr Mark Huddleston, Mrs Nuala Reid, Mrs Nicola Wilson, Mrs Pauline Leeson, Mr Chris Bruton, Mr Steven Lee, Ms Catherine McKay

In Attendance:

Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mrs Heather McKee (Deputy Principal Student Support Services), Mrs Emma Carson (Acting Director HR & Facilities), Mr Andrew Emmett (Acting Director IT & Finance), Mr Aidan Toal (ICS), Ms Martina McKeivitt (ICS)

Apologies: None

In the Chair: Mr Nugent

Before beginning the meeting, the Chair welcomed Ms McKay to her first Governing Body meeting and asked everyone present to provide a short introduction.

The Chair also welcomed the staff members from ICS who were attending the meeting in observation role as part of the effectiveness review.

b) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:

The Chair invited members to declare any known or perceived conflicts of interests.

- Mrs O'Hare advised she is employed by The Board of Governors of the Wallace High School (a NDPB) as Principal. The sponsor department for funding and development work and other applications is DENI supported by or delegated to the EA as appropriate. Is also current member of the College Advisory Group (Education) CAFRE DAERA CAFRE offers level 2 to level 6 + qualifications.
- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by CCMS whose sponsor department is DENI. She is a current member of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College.
- Mr McQuillan declared he is Chief Executive of Enterprise NI and a board member of Invest NI.
- The Interim Principal & CEO declared his daughter is employed as a lecturer at the College.
- Mr Hagen advised he had a potential conflict with regard to the amendment of the Remuneration SOP at agenda item 2D.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts.

c) Minutes from meeting on 24th September 2024

The minutes from 24th September were approved on the proposal of Michael McQuillan and seconded by Alan McCrum.

d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings:

The Secretary advised there are no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

e) Governance Framework

The Chair reminded members that he and the Secretary are always open to any suggestions or improvements members may wish to make in terms of the governance framework.

Mr Hagen highlighted the role of the Departmental representative at Audit committee, recently committee were advised that the rep should not be asked any questions in the meeting and they insisted on attending the closed sessions with the committee members and auditors at the November meeting. He added that the nature of the role has changed and it does impact on the committee.

The Secretary advised that page 35 of the Partnership Agreement states the rep can attend meetings including confidential meetings, however it was her view this was not a confidential meeting.

The Interim Principal & Chief Executive added that the independence of the Audit Committee needs to be recognised and suggested that this should be discussed with DfE in accordance with the Partnership Agreement.

Action: DfE role at Audit Committee will be discussed further at CWG to ensure the independence of the committee remains integral.

f) Annual Self-Assessment review

The Chair directed members to the report provided by the Department on the assessment exercise competed by members over the Summer. The Secretary added that it is an overall positive report and highlighted that if members feel their skills are not being utilized fully to highlight this with her or the Chair. She asked members to note that there have been several opportunities for members to work outside of their normal role and would encourage everyone to volunteer as these opportunities arise.

g) DfE Strategy Day December Update

The Chair advised that no agenda had been circulated yet for the session and he would provide an update on the session to members at the next meeting.

h) Membership

The Chair highlighted that there will be a vacancy in December when Mr. Huddleston's terms ends and the Department will fill this vacancy with the shortlist from the last competition. He added that with the recruitment of Ms. McKay, the skills gap in the current membership has now been addressed.

Agenda Item 2: Secretary's Business

a) Activity and Engagement Schedule 24/25

The Secretary asked members to note that she still required two more volunteers to MC the Excellence Awards in Downpatrick and Lisburn in April. Ms. McKay volunteered for the DPK ceremony.

b) Training/Briefing requirements

Mr. Stewart provided members with a comprehensive overview of the recent cyber security training session delivered by Bill McCluggage. He highlighted the role of the board in cyber security and that it was not just the responsibility of the Audit committee. He added that the ten curious questions used in the training provided a useful benchmark and the Chair of Audit committee suggested they were incorporated into the IT Resilience Statement that is already presented to the committee. The Acting Director of IT & Finance advised that it was timely to re-evaluate and update the format of the report as it had been initially developed to meet requirements from the Cabinet Office and it would be useful to analyse if it still fits the committee's current priorities.

Action: The IT Resilience Statement will be reviewed to ensure that it aligns to the committee's responsibilities in cyber security

c) Effectiveness Review update

The Secretary advised that the review has commenced, and the draft report should be issued in January. It is expected there will be a delay in the overall sector review as some Colleges are yet to commence their individual reviews.

d) Remuneration of Governing Body Chair and Members SOP

The Secretary presented the SOP for review and highlighted it has been reviewed after seeking Departmental advice on the payment of Public/Civil servants for meetings inside their normal working hours.

This is set out in the amendment, the Secretary added that this is a personal preference for members who choose to claim remuneration during their normal working.

The Secretary advised that it would be prudent for members employed in these sectors to seek written confirmation from their employer confirming that they are wholly fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of their substantive role in addition to the work they are undertaking as a member of SERC's Governing Body.

This will apply directly to any SERC related activity undertaken that is eligible for payment, during the normal working hours.

Agreed: The Remuneration of Governing Body Chair and Members SOP was approved on the proposal of Alan McCrum and Derek Wilson

e) Gifts and Hospitality Register

Members noted the register, there were no declarations made for the year 23/24.

Agenda Item 3: Correspondence:

a) GB Correspondence Log

Log provided to members in advance.

Members noted the correspondence log for information.

Agenda Item 4: Principal and Chief Executive's report:

Paper provided to members in advance.

The Interim Principal and Chief Executive talked to the written report provided and highlighted a summary of the key headlines. He highlighted that following feedback from DfE, colleges were asked to amend College Development Plan targets and these are detailed within the report.

In discussion members enquired if the target to increase the number of individuals supported by the College who are furthest away from the labour market and with low or no formal qualifications from 1424 no. in 2022/23 to 8327 no. in 2024/25 academic year was achievable. The Deputy Principal Student Support Services advised that it will be challenging but can be achieved when Peace Plus funding is received to deliver the social inclusion programmes.

At this juncture Mr Huddleston declared a conflict of interest as an employee of SEUPB that is responsible for delivering Peace Plus funding. No action was taken in relation to the declaration.

Agenda Item 5: Items for Approval

Papers provided to members in advance.

- a) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 12th September 2024 and briefing from meeting on 21st November

Mr Hagen, Chair of the Audit Committee, presented the minutes for adoption. He asked members to note the written briefing he had provided on the meeting from 21st November 2024.

The Chair of Audit highlighted some of the key areas of work from the last meeting including the result of the External Audit. He advised that there is a delay in the final sign off of the Annual Report and Financial Statements as there is a requirement for re-evaluation of the pension future liabilities by the Actuary. This has been asked for by the NIAO for all 6 colleges. When the valuation has been provided and included in the financial statements there will be another meeting to approve the final version of the annual report and financial statements. The pension figure will not alter the in-year financial position of the college.

Members noted the Unqualified Audit Opinion; No irregular expenditure; A report on the Accounts is not required; the going concern criteria was met; the Statement of Governance and Internal Control is compliant; no recommendations; one corrected misstatement (pay rise accrual), no uncorrected misstatements or irregular expenditure.

The committee also held a closed session with the Internal Auditors and were advised of the constructive and good working relationships they have with college staff and management.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mark Huddleston and seconded by Carolyn King.

Action: A report on raising concerns will be discussed at the next Audit committee meeting

- b) Audit Committee Annual Report 2023/24

The Chair of the Audit Committee highlighted the report sets out the work of the committee over the previous year and confirms the level of assurance the committee has received.

Agreed: The Audit Committee Annual report was approved on the proposal of Deborah O'Hare and seconded by Nicola Wilson.

- c) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 17th September 2024 and briefing from meeting on 5th November 2024

Mrs O'Hare, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption and asked members to note the written briefing from the recent meeting on 5th November 2024.

The Education Committee Chair highlighted some of the matters discussed during the last meeting including a report on the very positive ETI Inspection which the committee were highly impressed with and commended all staff involved.

The College Development Plan was discussed extensively, including the detailed feedback and requirements outlined by DfE. The CDP was approved.

The Education Committee noted the significant operational restructuring, the associated professional development and ongoing bedding of new management structures in schools.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Alan McCrum and seconded by Pauline Leeson.

- d) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 10th September 2024 and briefing from meeting on 19th November 2024
e)

Mr McCrum, Chair of the FGP Committee, presented the minutes for adoption. He advised a written briefing had been provided on the meeting held on 19th November 2024.

The FGP Chair began by reiterating the update from the Audit Chair on the Annual Report and Financial Statements. The sector has asked ISIO (actuaries) to reconsider this technical guidance, alongside the relevant NILGOSC Triennial Review Report at March 2022. Upon receipt of guidance FGP had reviewed and will formally adopt.

HR items were reviewed and committee requested that a process was developed so they have sight of ET1 forms relating to Industrial Tribunals when they are first received.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Sam Hagen.

Agenda Item 6: Policies for approval

- a) Library/Learning Resource Centre Policy
- b) Student Carer Policy
- c) Charity and Fundraising Policy
- d) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Policy
- e) Review of Financial Policies
- f) Review of HR policies
- g) Fees Policy 2025/26
- h) Raising Concerns Policy
- i) Student Performance, Behaviour and Disciplinary Management

Members noted the policies had been reviewed and the Fees policy required approval as it has been substantively changed.

The proposal is to increase all fees (except international). This proposal is set against the background of increasing employer pension contributions for teaching staff (increase in April 2024 from 25.1% to 29.1%), and the increase in national insurance contributions on employers in the most recent budget announcement.

Agreed: The Fees Policy 25/25 was approved on the proposal of Nuala Reid and seconded by Alan McCrum.

Agenda Item 7: Items for Information

Papers provided to members in advance.

- a) Accounts Update

The Interim Principal Chief Executive directed members to the written report and advised the College is on target. He briefly talked to the summary set out in the report as follows:

Year-to-date Result

For the six months ending 30 September 2024, the College has an actual Resource Requirement of **£21,606k** compared with a budgeted Resource Requirement of **£23,647k**; the year-to-date result is therefore **£2,041k better** than the original target.

Total Income (excluding Grant-in-aid) of **£5,804k** is **£810k better** than budget due to higher than budgeted Skill Up income, Apprenticeship NI and Grant Income, being partially offset by lower than budgeted Step-Up and Commercial Income.

The College accounts also show lower than budgeted Resource Expenditure. In total such **expenditure was £1,231k under budget** with **staff costs £757k lower** than budget and non-staff costs some **£474k below** where they were expected to be at this stage of the year.

Full Year Forecast

The £47,012k forecasted Resource Requirement matches the Resource Allocation target, as detailed above.

b) College Development Plan Progress Report

The Deputy Principal Student Support Services presented the latest progress report and highlighted that that all targets were met with the exception of improvements in the retention and achievement on a small number of courses. She added the new reporting format for this year will help to effectively monitor targets throughout the year.

In discussion the increased enrolment target for this year was discussed and the Interim Principal and CEO highlighted that SERC has significantly reduced its staffing complement over the last 2 years. Therefore, although the College will attempt to deliver against its 24/25 targets, it is unable to commit to delivering ever increasing targets in subsequent years within the current staffing capacity. He stressed the importance of the Department accepting this.

Members expressed concern that staff are already being left to absorb a significant amount of work now that a layer of staffing has been removed from the College structure. It was noted that there is a duty of care to consider the impact this is having on staff in terms of workload and pastoral care.

Action: FGP committee to keep visibility on the impact extra work and reduced staffing compliment is having on staff

c) Areas for focus prospectus

The Deputy Principal Student Support Services talked to the written paper provided and outlined opportunities where members can assist the college. She talked through how key contacts and business may refer students for placements and traineeships. In response to a question on which areas are hardest to find placements for the DP advised that barbering, hairdressing and construction are areas that can be problematic.

d) Staff Governor Reports

Members were asked to note the written reports provided by the Staff Governors at 007D.1

In discussion with the Teaching Staff Governor, he highlighted there are issues with the staff and student portals and confusion over the staffing structures in terms of hierarchy in some schools.

Action: The Acting Director of IT & Finance will review the staff issues with the respective portals ASAP

Action: A communication on the new structure including clarity on new roles will be disseminated through the Deputy Principal Curriculum and Head of Schools.

Action: Acting Director HR & Facilities will bring a paper summarising the structure to the next F&GP Committee for discussion.

e) Student Governor Report

The Student Governor referenced the paper at 007E and highlighted some of the recent activity. In discussion he highlighted the Recharge rooms are excellent resource for students and are heavily utilised and the SU would like to increase the opening times of the rooms. The Deputy Principal SS advised that they have been reviewing the process for opening time but have been unable to identify a mechanism yet as only those Staff with mental health first aid training can manage the rooms. Members suggested that SU officers could receive mental health first aid training to help with the additional opening hours.

Action: The Deputy Principal SS agreed to review the opening times of the Recharge rooms, creatively but safely to ensure they are still used for the purpose intended.

Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business:

The Chair noted that this was Mr Huddleston's last GB meeting before his terms ended and he thanked him for his very contribution and wished him well for the future.

Agenda Item 9: Confidential Business

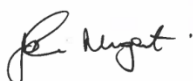
A separate note was taken for this item.

Date of next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Tuesday 17th February 2025 17.30, Lisburn Campus, Meeting room D floor.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 8.35pm

Signed:



Date: 11.02.25

John Nugent

Chair of the Governing Body