



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

held on Thursday 21st April 2026 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 (Principal/CEO), Mr Darren Stewart, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Derek Wilson, Mrs Carolyn King, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mrs Nuala Reid, Mr Mark Brashier, Mr Steven Lee, Ms Grainne McVeigh, Mrs Nicola Wilson, Ms Catherine McKay, Mr Paul Finnegan, Ms Denise Stockman, Dr Danny McConnell, Mr Alan McCrum, Mrs Pauline Leeson.

### **In Attendance:**

Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr Colin McGuckin (Deputy CEO), Mr Paul Walsh (Head of Learner Welfare) Item 3 only

**Apologies:** None

**In the Chair:** Mr John Nugent

b) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:

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

- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by DENI. She is a current member of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College.
- The Principal & CEO declared his daughter is employed as a lecturer at the College.
- Mr Lee declared his wife is employed as a Deputy Head of School at the College and his son is employed as Learning Support assistant.
- Ms Stockman advised she is employed as a Strategic Advisor at SIB.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts. Members were reminded that they should declare any potential conflicts to agenda items should they arise during the meeting.

c) Minutes from meeting on 12<sup>th</sup> February 2026.

*Papers previously provided to members.*

The minutes from the meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> February were approved on the proposal of Nuala Reid and seconded by Sam Hagen.

d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings:

*Papers previously provided to members.*

All actions from the previous meeting were reported as complete.

e) Governance Framework

The Secretary presented the revised Governance Framework. Members noted that the overarching Strategy has not yet been approved by the Department; Standing Orders will be updated should approval be secured.

The Chair invited further feedback from members to support any additional refinement or development.

## Agenda Item 2: Secretary's Business

*Papers previously provided to members.*

a) Activity and Engagement Schedule 25/26

The Secretary directed members to the schedule; she encouraged members to attend the upcoming student and staff excellence awards.

She added that she will alert members of any relevant events as they come through the Marketing team.

b) Training/Briefing requirements

Members noted:

- Governing Body training scheduled for 4 June 2026
- IOSH training as part of the ongoing development programme

The Secretary advised that the Department for the Economy is not currently offering Effective Governance training. Members who wish to undertake a refresher course were advised that they may attend the course scheduled for 4 June, delivered through the Chief Executives Forum.

### Agenda Item 3: Student Welfare

The Head of Learner Welfare delivered a detailed presentation on student welfare, demand pressures and service delivery.

Key points arising from discussion included:

- The assessment methodology has remained fundamentally consistent, although complexity and scale of need have increased.
- Demand for welfare services can no longer be met effectively by individual teams alone and requires a holistic, College-wide approach.
- Discussion explored whether some non-reporting may be linked to learner belonging and wellbeing.
- Members discussed the relationship between behaviour and wider family circumstances, acknowledging the need for further analysis.
- The Governing Body commended the College's strong culture of professional curiosity and inclusive practice.
- Assurance was provided regarding students assessed as not currently safe or ready to attend College, with examples shared of how such decisions are managed sensitively and responsibly, balancing individual and wider learner welfare.
- Members discussed current and proposed models of enhanced support, including a sector move away from blanket 1-to-1 provision towards needs-based, behaviour-led support.
- Capacity challenges were noted, including benchmarking with other providers.
- The Principal & CEO outlined ongoing engagement with the Department and ETI, including emerging findings highlighting a lack of strategic direction at Departmental level and increasing volumes of need across the sector.
- Members noted forthcoming workshops intended to explore sustainable models prior to publication of the ETI report, while recognising likely funding constraints.
- Staff workload impacts and the mainstreaming of welfare support within curriculum areas were discussed, with reassurance provided on steps taken to improve visibility, flexibility and effectiveness of support.

The Chair, on behalf of the Governing Body, thanked the Head of Learner Welfare for a comprehensive and insightful presentation and commended the quality of care provided.

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

***Paper provided to members in advance.***

#### a) CEO's update

The Principal & CEO spoke to the written report and provided contextual updates.

Members noted:

- Overall performance improvement compared to the previous year, while acknowledging continued challenge in some target areas.
- Delivery pressures relating to year-round and commercial programmes, including staffing and retention impacts.
- Ongoing work with the Department to develop alternative models to improve effectiveness of summer provision.
- Financial performance at month 11 showing a stronger position than anticipated, including clarification of technical accounting adjustments.
- Progress on an investment programme being driven at senior level.
- An update on FE Reform, outlining an 18-month, codesigned programme with four core objectives:
  - Curriculum alignment with industry need
  - Improved value for money
  - Enhanced learner experience
  - Increased learner participation
- Members noted that staff from the College have been nominated to participate directly in Department led curriculum framework development.

The complexity and ambition of FE Reform, particularly within tight timescales, was recognised.

### Agenda Item 5: Items for Approval

*Papers provided to members in advance.*

#### a) Standing Orders

The Secretary presented the revised Standing Orders for consideration as part of good governance arrangements. Members requested further clarity on when decisions require a formal vote and when a proposer and seconder is sufficient. The Secretary confirmed that this would be reviewed and clarified within the document. Members also highlighted a small number of typographical issues and additional comments during the discussion. It was agreed that the Secretary would rework the Standing Orders to address the points raised and bring a further revised version back to the next meeting for consideration.

**Action:** Members to submit any additional feedback on the revised Standing Orders to the Secretary within two weeks.

#### b) Committee and GB Meeting Dates 2026/27

Members noted the proposed dates for the 2026/27 academic year and noted the change in usual cycle to accommodate the new Financial Year end on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

**Agreed:** The meeting schedule for 2026/27 was agreed on the proposal of Majella Corrigan and seconded by Alan McCrum.

- c) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 3<sup>rd</sup> February and briefing from meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2026

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 14<sup>th</sup> April

Mr Hagen talked to the written report and advised the Committee noted no changes to the Strategic Risk Register, with two Red risks relating to financial viability and cyber security, and two Amber risks relating to industrial relations and increasing demand for support for learners with special educational needs. Operational curriculum risks were discussed, including enrolment pressures and staffing challenges. Assurances were provided on IT resilience and cyber security, including confirmation of Cyber Essentials Plus accreditation and that the College's secure score remained above target. The Committee approved the Report to Those Charged with Governance, noting an unqualified audit opinion, no irregularity or impropriety, and no misstatements, together with two accepted audit findings. An Internal Audit report on Space Management and Room Utilisation identified no significant risks and included two recommendations. The Committee noted nil fraud, progress with the internal audit programme, and considered future audit planning, accounts timetable arrangements, and sustainability reporting requirements.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Carolyn King and seconded by Danny McConnell.

- a) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 27<sup>th</sup> January and briefing from meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2026

Ms Corrigan, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption and asked members to note the written briefing from the recent meeting on 31<sup>st</sup> March.

Ms Corrigan talked to the written briefing and highlighted the following:

The Committee agreed the minutes of the previous meeting and noted progress on improving the presentation of applications and enrolment data to support tracking against the College Development Plan. Members welcomed positive feedback from ETI following the evaluation of special educational needs and disabilities provision and commended staff for their work in this challenging area. The Committee received a presentation on Training Programmes and Apprenticeships, noting the scale and complexity of provision, funding and compliance requirements, and discussed key challenges including staffing pressures, minimum wage increases and changes to disability support arrangements. Members considered a draft response to the consultation on widening participation in higher education, emphasising the need for a nuanced, well-resourced approach. Updates were received on the proposed Governing Body Strategy Day, quality assurance requirements, progress against the College Development Plan and Quality Improvement Plans,

higher education matters, safeguarding and learning support pressures, business and partnerships activity, and a minor revision to the Higher Education Admissions Policy.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Sam Hagen and seconded by Steven Lee.

- b) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 29<sup>th</sup> January 2026 and briefing from meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2026.

Mr McCrum, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, presented the minutes for adoption and asked members to note the written briefing from the recent meeting on 2<sup>nd</sup> April 2026.

Mr McCrum talked to the written briefing and highlighted the following:

The Committee approved the Baseline Operational Budget for 2026/27, noting the uncertainty of Departmental funding and the need for ongoing scrutiny and mitigation of financial pressures. A one-year extension to the Healthcare Scheme was approved, recognising its strong value for money. The Committee noted the in-year financial position to February 2026, which was reporting ahead of budget, and received assurances that no areas of strategic financial concern had been identified. Updates were noted on prompt payment performance, estates and capital projects, HR priorities and employee relations, with no matters of strategic concern raised. Progress against the staff survey action plan was reviewed and will continue to be monitored. The Committee received a health and safety update, noting ongoing improvement activity and work to strengthen documentation control and assurance. The Committee approved the revised Acceptable Use Policy and noted updates to Data Protection, Records Management and Access to Information policies.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Nuala Reid

## Agenda Item 6: Policies for approval

### *Acceptable use Policy*

The Chair of the FGP committee presented the policy for approval, he advised the committee had reviewed the substantive changes and were content to recommend it for adoption.

**Agreed;** The Acceptable Use Policy was approved on the proposal of Nicola Wilson and seconded by Nuala Reid.

## Agenda Item 7: Items for Information

### ***Papers provided to members in advance.***

a) Management Accounts

The Principal directed members to the written report at 007A for noting.

b) Staff Governor Reports

On the invitation of the Chair, the Corporate Staff Governor presented an overview of her written report at 007B. The Staff Governor reflected on recent staff engagement activity, with particular emphasis on the Staff Excellence Awards. She highlighted the depth and quality of feedback received through the judging process, noting the inspirational nature of staff contributions across the College.

Attendance at both staff and student awards events was described as powerful and affirming, with members highlighting the impact of hearing directly why individuals were nominated and recognised. The visible pride of families in attendance was also noted.

Members welcomed the increased staff interest generated by communications following the awards, with staff seeking further involvement in future activity. The Governing Body commended the quality of the staff awards process and the consistent excellence demonstrated across the organisation.

The Teaching Staff Governor talked to his written report and raised operational pressures associated with T-Levels administration, noting the intensive assessment and paperwork demands at a particularly busy point in the academic year. Members recognised this as a challenging period for staff and acknowledged that concerns have been raised with management.

The Principal & CEO confirmed that the College Management Team is aware of these pressures and is considering changes to qualification delivery where appropriate, including review of qualifications that carry disproportionate administrative burden, as well as future consideration of transversal skills.

Members also noted external engagement activity, including creative and cultural sector collaboration opportunities.

c) Student Governor Report

The Student Governor presented an overview of the written report, highlighting current areas of focus and student engagement activity across the College.

The Secretary commended the Students' Union for its delivery of the Green Dot campaign, noting its particular importance given that Violence Against Women and Girls continues to be a pressing issue in Northern Ireland. Members welcomed the initiative as a positive and proactive contribution to awareness-raising and cultural change within the College community. The Student Governor advised that the initiative is open to staff as well as students, which was noted positively by the Governing Body.

The Governing Body thanked the Student Governor for the update and reaffirmed the value of the student voice in informing institutional decision-making.

**Action:** Letters of congratulations will be issued to the students involved in the Washington Ireland Program

#### Agenda Item 8: Any Other Business:

The Chair provided an update on his meeting with the new FE Director, advising that a detailed and constructive discussion had taken place. Members noted that the newly appointed FE Director has expressed a strong commitment to keeping students at the centre of her focus. It was further noted that she is keen to change the narrative around Further Education as a positive choice for students, with a stronger emphasis on outcomes. The Governing Body welcomed this approach.

Members were advised that the FE Director will attend the Strategy Day, which will provide an opportunity for direct engagement and further discussion.

The Principal & CEO also highlighted a number of recent College achievements and external recognitions, including:

- Grace Duggan being named Higher Level Apprentice of the Year
- Pearson success with two shortlisted finalists in the Culinary Arts team and lecturer Steven McGreevy
- The College being awarded Net Zero Carbon Organisation of the Year at the All-Ireland Finance and Business Awards

The Governing Body congratulated all those involved on these significant achievements.

#### Agenda Item 9: Confidential Business

A separate note was taken for this item.

No other business was discussed and the meeting concluded at 7.15pm

#### **Date of next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 30<sup>th</sup> June 2026, Lisburn Campus, 5.30pm

Signed:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**John Nugent**

**Chair of the Governing Body**