

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON TUESDAY 22 JUNE 2021 AT 17.30 VIA TELECONFERENCE.

PRESENT:

Mr Andrew Saunders (Chair)
Mr Brian Doran (SRC CEO)
Mr Scott Alexander
Mrs Teresa Campbell
Mr Arder Carson
Mr Aaron Foy
Mr Gordon Gough
Mr Aidan McCormick
Mr John Nugent
Prof Gregory O'Hare
Mr Tom Redmond
Dr Eileen Stewart
Mr Kieran Swail
Mrs Judith Thompson
Mr Matthew Turner
Mrs Nicola Wilson

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr Keith Kilpatrick, Director of Curriculum
Mr Terry McGonigal, Director of Finance and Planning
Mr Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services
Mr Lewis Cooper, Independent Commission College of the Future
Mr Brendan McGuigan, Boardroom Apprentice
Miss Lindsay Armstrong, Secretary to the Governing Body

The meeting convened at 17.40.

Mr Saunders welcomed all parties to the last Governing Body of the academic year. He remarked on a difficult year and thanked Members for their exemplary attendance at the virtual meetings.

A01. NORTHERN IRELAND COLLEGE OF THE FUTURE

Mr Saunders welcomed Mr Cooper to the meeting.

Mr Cooper introduced himself as Director of the Independent Commission and advised Members of the work undertaken by the four nations, providing an overview of the approach, vision and recommendations arising. He informed that the Commission is Chaired by Sir Ian Diamond and nation specific reports have been produced addressing the key changes impacting education delivery. Mr Cooper advised that the Northern Ireland report strongly reflects the Commission's vision for the college of the future in relation to people, productivity and place and striking the right balance of the critical role of colleges in the economy. He advised on the focus of promoting a new approach to lifelong learning.

Mr Carson arrived at the meeting at 17.49.

Mr Cooper informed that it is advisable to redress unproductive competition, using innovation to adopt a networked approach. He stated the importance of funding, governance and accountability, measuring outputs and creating an integrated tertiary education system.

Mr Cooper advised on the importance of College Governing Bodies leading the way locally and championing the approach.

In response to a query from the Chair, Mr Cooper advised that differing levels of reform are required to increase cohesive working relationships and safeguard lifelong learning by ensuring appropriate funding is available.

Mr Cooper described the NI coordination as exemplary and Members noted the recommendation for a single coherent college structure. Mr Turner advised that funding needs to be aligned and roles defined in order to provide a wide breadth of inclusive curriculum.

ACTION By whom

Mr Cooper recommended that further strategic conversations take place and noted that the development of HUBs is working well. He stated that Government needs to articulate the vision for strategy, funding and terrain and for colleges to build on collaboration and employer engagement.

On behalf of the Governing Body, Mr Saunders thanked Mr Cooper for his comprehensive report.

Mr Cooper left the meeting at 18.33.

A02. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

A03. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the commencement of the meeting any conflict of interest held in matters to be discussed.

No interests were declared.

A04. MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING 20 APRIL 2021

The minutes of the Governing Body meeting of 20 April 2021 were reviewed for accuracy, and unanimously approved on proposal from Mrs Thompson and seconded by Mr Gough.

A05. MATTERS ARISING

Members noted that all matters outstanding from the last meeting have been addressed.

A06. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

Mr Saunders noted that it is Mrs Campbell and Mr Carson last meeting of the Governing Body and thanked them for their expertise and guidance over the many years.

Mr Saunders thanked Mrs Wilson and Mr Gough for agreeing to yet a further extension to their tenures of office.

Mr Saunders advised that it is Mr McGuigan's last meeting as Boardroom Apprentice and wished him well on future endeavours. Members were advised that Janet Toal has been matched as SRC's Boardroom Apprentice 2021-2022.

Mr Saunders reminded Members to advise the Secretary on their availability for finance training and to return their Committee self-assessment questionnaire.

Mr Saunders advised that consideration of Committee membership is required and in particular the chairmanship of the Finance and Education Committee needs addressing.

Governors were asked to consider their Committee membership and advise the Chair or the Secretary of any changes they wish to propose.

Mr McGonigal advised that he is retiring from the College and confirmed that this evening's meeting would be his last as attendee to the Governing Body.

Members thanked Mrs Campbell, Mr Carson, Mr McGuigan and Mr McGonigal for their assistance and wished them well for the future, stating they would be sorely missed.

Governors

Governors

A07. COMMITTEE MINUTES

- **Staffing Committee 4 May 2021**

Mr Alexander provided an overview of discussions taking place at the Staffing Committee meeting of 4 May and informed that the staff survey results on remote working, which yielded a 37% response rate, was reviewed.

He advised that Members remarked on an excellent Competency Framework document, reviewed the KPI report and draft Employee Development Plan for 2021-2022 noting challenges that have arisen due to Covid-19 and developments relating to Project Based Learning.

Mr Alexander informed that deliberations had taken place regarding the Article 55 report and Members discussed affirmative actions in the future should this be advised by the Equality Commission.

- **Audit Committee 11 May 2021**

Mr Nugent referred Members to the draft Audit Committee minutes of 11 May and provided detail on the review of the Internal Audit reports on Cyber Security, Key Financial Controls and the Internal Audit Progress Report.

He advised that Members had conducted their annual restricted pre meeting with the Internal Auditors and were provided with assurance that all relevant parties are viewed to be working diligently to support the various College functions.

Mr Nugent confirmed that Members reviewed a report on Enhancing the Control Framework in Education and were advised that work is ongoing in relation to the Internal Audit Strategy 2021-2022 to incorporate audits in areas connected with Covid-19 student support funding initiatives. Mr Nugent advised that Terms of Reference are being developed in relation to this.

Mr Nugent confirmed that the External Audit Strategy was presented to Members and discussion took place regarding the difficulties last experienced in signing off the annual accounts. He advised that the Fraud Self-Assessment Checklist was considered and the quarterly review of the Corporate Risk Register was conducted. Mr Nugent provided detail on the two areas identified under horizon scanning and advised Members on the predominant risks.

Mr Nugent confirmed that the Committee conducted their regular review of the Direct Award Contracts and DfE Compliance Audits and on behalf of Members, thanked Mr McGonigal for his stewardship over the years.

- **Education Committee 25 May 2021**

Mr Gough referred Governors to the draft minutes of the Education Committee of 25 May and thanked Members, Miss Armstrong and the Senior Management Team for their support throughout the period. He advised that Members were provided with comprehensive progress reports by Faculty heads and conducted their annual review of the Student Summary report noting an unusual year from the students' perspective.

Mr Gough advised that Members were encouraged by a positive report in the Faculty of Health and Science, and particularly pleased to note the development of a pre-nursing certificate as part of a degree in Nursing, successful validation in Applied Industrial Science and partnership with John Moore's University Liverpool to deliver a BA Honours and potentially a MSc in English and History.

Mr Gough advised that Members were provided with updates on Centre Determined Grades and the 14-19 review, and approved several policies.

Mr Kilpatrick confirmed that validation had taken place earlier in the day as part of the pre-nursing certificate and stated that all parties appeared to be impressed with the College representation. He relayed his personal thanks to Mrs Davison and Mrs Murray for their tremendous efforts in developing the new curriculum.

- **Finance and General Purposes Committee 1 June 2021**

Mrs Campbell referred Members to the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee of 1 June. She confirmed that the Committee conducted their regular review of the Management Accounts and were advised on variances due to timing issues. She informed that Committee Members were advised that bad debt is expected to come down considerably however the write off will likely increase compared to previous years.

Mrs Campbell advised that Members reviewed the provisional budget allocation, Direct Awards Contracts and the Complaints and Compliment report. She informed that complaints have increased compared to the previous year, and that a substantial number related to Covid-19. Mrs Campbell relayed that the College has been focused on minimising disruption to students.

Mrs Campbell informed that the Committee were advised of one non reportable data incident, advising that two members of staff were issued with the wrong payslip and the matter had been followed up appropriately. She informed that Members reviewed the Internal Audit report on Key Financial Controls and approved several policies.

Mrs Campbell confirmed that Members had made recommendation to an amendment to the Mobile and Remote Working policy and advised that further consideration be given to the loyalty schemes being proposed for 2022-23.

Mrs Campbell thanked Committee Members for their support over the years and extended her gratitude to Mr McGonigal and Ms McGuigan for their guidance.

The minutes were formally adopted by the Governing Body.

A08. STANDING ORDERS

Mr Saunders referred Members to minor amendments to the Standing Orders which were unanimously approved on proposal from Mr Turner and seconded by Mr Gough.

A09. CDP 2021-2022 AND ACTION PLAN

Mr Doran referred Members to the College Development Plan and advised on key changes to the plan from that previously tabled in January reflecting the new skills strategy and the DfE economic recovery plan including flexible skills fund, free programmes and advanced technical awards. He spoke to an unusual year and advised that submission of the Plan has been deferred until early Autumn to allow for the inclusion of actual enrolment figures and the confirmation of budget.

Members discussed the appropriateness of the inclusion of a summary sheet for lengthy documents to highlight key points or changes.

Mr Kilpatrick advised that on the agreement of Members, the Curriculum Strategy is to be deferred to the new academic term in order to reflect key challenges.

Executive Team

Mr Kilpatrick

A10. DRAFT BUDGET PLAN 2021-2022

Mr McGonigal referred Members to the Indicative Budget report reviewed by Members of the Finance and General Purposes Committee earlier in the month. He referred to the table on budget requirements and reported a shortfall of approximately £1.5m on the opening budget allocation.

Mr McGonigal stated that the Budget Plan will be further refined when enrolments can be confirmed and advised on Covid-19 bids for additional funding.

Prof O'Hare spoke to a difficult situation, underpinned by a number of uncertainties. He described the situation as far from ideal and stated that the issue of underfunding places the College in an unsuitable position for strategic and budgetary planning.

Mr McGonigal acknowledged the difficult circumstances and the impact this will have on recruitment requirements. He advised that colleges are reliant on sourcing additional funding through monitoring rounds and explained the challenge that arises from not baselining pay awards.

Members acknowledged that the recommendations as detailed in the College of the Future report will require appropriate funding to appreciate their potential.

A11. ADMISSIONS / ENROLMENT UPDATE 2021-2022

Mr Kilpatrick referred Members to the Admissions report detailing applications on previous years, by course category and by faculty. He informed that although circumstances have improved, total applications are down 34% on the previous year.

Mr Kilpatrick advised on a number of engagements taking place to mitigate against challenges including the retention of students, provision of a flexible skills fund, marketing initiatives and the development of a coherent tertiary system.

Mr Doran advised Members on the establishment by DfE of a tertiary education group consisting of the six regional Colleges, Universities, University Colleges and CAFRE and highlighted some early work on the development and launch of a new portal designed to provide school pupils with access to all higher education options in NI through one source.

Mr Kilpatrick advised that many apprenticeship employers are still in recovery and remarked on a critical piece of work to drive up apprenticeship numbers for the new academic year.

A12. REGISTER OF INTERESTS 2020-2021

Mr Saunders referred Governors to the Register of Interest and advised Members to inform the Secretary of any declarations as they arise.

A13. SPORTS TOP POLICY

Mr Sloan reminded Members of the history and many considerations of the College's Sports Top policy, including representation from the student body and advice from the Equality Commission.

He advised that he was seeking Governors' approval for a permanent extension of the current position to lift the ban on all sports emblems, notwithstanding Rangers and Celtic.

Mr Sloan confirmed that there has been no incidents of concern raised over the last three years relating to a relaxation of the policy.

Mr Gough repeated his previously cited trepidation of lifting the complete ban on sports emblems, reiterating his view that the College is preparing young people for the workplace at which point many organisations will impose a complete ban on the wearing of sports emblems.

The Directorate relayed that very few learners come onto campus displaying sports emblems, that no incidents of concern have been raised, nor any prevalence for team or campus been identified. This view was shared by the Student Governor.

Members unanimously agreed to continue with the current arrangements, recognising should any issues arise then the Governing Body could review the policy.

A14. ARTICLE 55 REPORT

Mr Sloan referred Governors to the Article 55 report and confirmed that the document was reviewed by Members of the Staffing Committee at their last meeting.

Mr Sloan advised that feedback from the Equality Commission will be provided to Members of the Staffing Committee.

Members noted the report.

A15. STAFF AND STUDENT SURVEY REPORT

Mr Sloan referred to the staff and student survey reports and advised that the main outworking of the reports is that management are considering proposals on flexible working from home.

Members discussed the staff benefits which may be gained by adopting a hybrid model of remote working for certain roles.

Governors were also apprised of the appropriateness of a flexibility delivery model in some aspects of curriculum provision, namely higher education and business support highlighting the need to maintain face to face delivery for the core delivery for FE and WBL provision. Members noted that the development of digital skills for all learners will remain a priority.

Mr Alexander advised on areas of collaboration which may allow for delivery of a wider range of online curriculum thus extending the reach of colleges. Discussion followed on the challenges faced in taking forward a wider sector approach to online delivery.

Members recommended that the proposals for flexible hybrid working be further reviewed at the annual Strategy Day.

Miss Armstrong

A16. COMPETENCY FRAMEWORK

Mr Sloan referred Governors to the Competency Framework approved by Members of the Staffing Committee. He advised that the document has been referred to trade unions for comment and it is intended to be shared with the wider workforce.

Mr Sloan committed to provide feedback to Members at the Strategy Day in December and report on the impact of the framework on recruitment and selection, performance management and learning and development.

Mr Sloan

A17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Mr Swail provided Members with detail on the virtual conference A Pathway for Growth scheduled for 24 June.

Mr Redmond confirmed that he recently attended the annual meeting of the Hardship Committee and reported on the substantial amount of support provided to 394 students in a range of areas. He advised that the level of support was significantly lower this year as a direct result of the pandemic and college closures and commended Mr Mallon and his team for the support provided to learners.

A18. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the full Governing Body is scheduled for 17.30 on Tuesday 31 August 2021.

The meeting concluded at 20.26.

CHAIR

DATE

