

## Minutes of the meeting of the Virtual Finance and General purposes Committee held on Tuesday 28 February at 4.30pm

<b>Present:</b>	Melinda Stacey	Board Chair and Committee Chair
	Stephen Wells	External Governor
	Richard Bevan	External Governor
	Sean Mackney	Principal and CEO
	Neil Tanton	Staff Governor

<b>In attendance:</b>	Bill Blythe	Vice Principal Finance, Resources & Regional Affairs
	Jason Jones	Deputy Principal Education and Learners.
	Sheena Murphy-Collett	Vice-Principal for Human Resources, People and Organisational Development
	Joanna Boardman	Governance Advisor and Head of Executive Office

- 1. Apologies for Absence**  
Apologies from David Chalmers were received, and Melinda Stacey was nominated to chair the meeting in his absence. Neil Tanton was unable to join until the Digital Strategy update.
- 2. Declaration of Interests**  
No declarations of pecuniary or non-pecuniary interests were made in respect of the items on the agenda.
- 3. Confidential Items**  
One item was noted as confidential and was shown as such on the agenda
- 4. Matters Arising**
- 5. Matters Brought Forward by the Chair**  
No business was brought forward by the Chair.
- 6. Minutes and Actions**  
The minutes were approved as written.

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## 7. People

### 7.1 HR Leavers Report 21/22 (to note)

22FGP15

The paper was taken as read with it being noted that only 35 people had responded. The committee questioned how the survey was conducted and what could be changed to encourage a greater response rate.

The college confirmed that once a leaver is confirmed they are sent a link by email currently. There is a risk that staff do not complete the survey as they feel it may impact on any reference they may receive. Some better communication needs to be employed to assure people of the security of their details.

It was noted that there had been a gap in the Head of People role, but once that was filled on 20 March this would be reviewed.

It was asked if the line manager could conduct the survey, but the college stated that this was the way it had been done previously and the response was worse.

The committee asked if it could be reviewed with alternate options being investigated around line managers, HR performing them, online or face to face

It was agreed that it was important to increase the response rate to provide some credibility to the analysis that follows. Some slightly worrying numbers were noted in the table on page 3-4 but from a low response rate the committee was not sure how much consideration to give to it.

It was also agreed that with low response rate it is more likely that the overall response is negative rather than positive one.

The report was taken as noted

### 7.2 HR Autumn Report (to recommend)

22FGP16

The report was taken as read with the sickness absence noted as looking lower than recent reports. There are still some cases of long term sickness and cases related to Covid . It was noted that the college signs up to the 'Dying to Work Charter' and that there are two terminal cases withing this at different stages of their pay limits.

The committee questioned the fact that the overall staffing numbers appear static and asked if that was in line with the falling student numbers that they are aware of. An error was noted that in the report the year was shown as 2021 where it should have read 2022 (this would be updated before the board meeting) Stephen.

The college sought to reassure the committee that financial challenges are taken into consideration and that there is work underway now on staffing numbers as part of business planning and Sustain and Grow.

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The college recognised the challenges of filling some roles where applicant numbers were very low which resulted in the occasional instance of a staff member not passing their probationary period which has led to inconsistency of provision. That has led to an increase in agency costs, although currently this is low because of focused work in Sustain and Grow.

There still exists a challenge in recruiting and retaining staff particularly in areas of high subject demand. English and Maths tutors can earn £10k more per annum in a school setting, yet colleges are picking up the students who have been failed at school level.

Questions from the Committee:

- Could historic Year on Year data be provided to see the total staff compliment movements
- Examples of longer term comparisons and trends to be added?
- Could non-consolidated methods to retain staff be explored?

It was recognised that the college was operating within tight financial constraints and that any chances of non-consolidated methods to retain staff may have parity and impact issues.

It was noted that there now exists a need to consider any new regularity requirements for managing public money.

Report recommended on condition of correcting the year error

## **7.3 College Surveys Update Report (to recommend)**

**22FGP17**

The report was taken as read and the committee asked if in a future paper the surveys that had been stopped could be confirmed as well as those that were still running.

The employer survey was questioned around its response rate appearing to be very low and asked for a discussion on how to improve that as they were concerned that it shows a lack of engagement. It was noted that employer relationships were very important especially around apprenticeships.

An additional consideration noted was that to be compliant with Ofsted colleges are required to demonstrate good relationships.

The college shared that it is undertaking some work already on improving both the relationships themselves as well as the engagement with the survey. More in person attention to the completion of the survey can include asking employers to complete them at the end of stakeholder meetings. The methods of communication and completion of the surveys are and will be continued to be reviewed.

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The committee asked for:

- The purpose, number of responses, percentage of responses and results and actions from the surveys
- Would like to see what the purpose is, number of responses and the percentage and results and actions – who are we gathering it from and what are we asking and the methods and how are we responding to its major stakeholders
- Greater consistency on the RAG ratings, desire to look in detail at major issues, but not to ignore the better areas.
- Can there be a stakeholder analysis

It was questioned if all the surveys listed were still needed as there were still a lot listed. At this time the college felt that they were all still appropriate but would be under constant review.

The report was agreed to be recommend with the above asks actioned for discussion at board.

## **8. Policies**

### **8.1 Pay and Grading Guidelines & Pay Policy and Procedure (to recommend) 22FGP18**

Approved for recommendation to Board

### **8.2 Course Fee policy (to recommend) 22FGP19**

With clarification for any new members the college shared that the Board sets the fee policy, but not the fees themselves. Those are constrained and regulated across the Office for Students and the Department for Education with some discretion to ensure a balance between commerciality and market forces.

Approved for Recommendation to Board

## **9. Finance**

### **9.1 5 Year Financial Strategy (to receive) 22FGP20**

To be considered in line with the confidential item in any other business

### **9.2 Month 6 Accounts (to receive) 22FGP21**

Removed for consideration – see confidential minutes

### **9.3 Annual Accounts of the Petroc Student Union (to approve) 22FGP22**

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The accounts were taken as read and the committee had no questions.

The accounts were approved

## 9.4 Project Performance Update (to note)

22FGP23

The [paper was taken as read with the college clarifying that it showed all the different projects, what value is assigned to them and the timeline they sit alongside.

A concern was noted that some have had small value with the wider community and learner not in employment, education or training (NEET) issues. It was further noted that the funding regime has changed radically with ESF finishing June 2023, part of G Block may be the last piece of Euro Funding work to be completed.

It is being replaced with the Shared Prosperity funding which is £8.5m across the whole of Devon with North Devon and Torridge suggesting a set of schemes that largely don't include Petroc.

This in turn puts the current projects team and activity at risk. There is hope that the TURIN bid will be successful with a small Education Training Foundation small for technical continual development.

This issue may create a strategic risk rather than a financial as the projects and associated staffing are self-supporting.

The report was noted

## 10. Strategy Updates

### 10.1 Estates Strategy

22FGP24

The committee was informed of an urgent building update where there has been a collapse in the structure of some autoclaved aerated concrete (lightweight concrete with steel rod usually found in beams). This is not a full collapse of a building but areas at risk have been evacuated with staff and students relocating across the campus and North Devon.

A timber based solution will be used to brace the beams which will result in major works on this site and as this will be disruptive and noisy as much as possible will be scheduled over the weekends and the Easter break.

A rough costing of £200-250k is expected at this time and the college will be trying to seek some DFE support, but not confirmed.

*Note: The Staff Governor joined the meeting*

It was noted that this involves risk mitigation to protect life in this matter to ensure the health and safety of students and staff. In heavy snow further areas

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would need to be evacuated before the repairs and if pooling formed through heavy rain on the roofs in question it may also need to be considered.

The committee expressed assurance that correct guidance being followed and that risks were being mitigated.

Within the strategy as a hold the only item of note was that the conveyancing at the nurse in Tiverton was taking some time.

Update was noted

## 10.2 Digital Strategy

22FGP25

The Vice-Principal in this area confirmed that they had been working closely with RB as governor and thanked them for the engagement and feedback outside of this meeting.

The update was taken as read with the committee asking about how the proposed team restructure in digital would work and how activity in the old structure would change as well as how any staffing allocation may alter.

The governance professional noted that there was a conflict of interest as the staff governor works within the team being discussed and consideration for that was noted and it was confirmed that they were aware of everything in the paper and no specific names were mentioned.

The college shared that the restructuring followed two key priorities:

- Design a future-forward structure
- Create efficiencies and savings tabled are over the requested the amount.

The design considers a three year view and seeks to resolve issues with staff recruitment and retention and work has been undertaken with INTEGTY as a third party expert. Whilst it is recognised that due to the constraints present for the college currently it is not exactly what would be wanted it is a good move towards it and achievable now.

The process was described as on that would recognise the existing skill sets, not to just mitigate redundancy, but also look to retain good staff within the college overall as the right thing to do and that they would offer reasonable retraining where appropriate.

In response to the committee asking if there were any security issues due to the restructuring it was confirmed that the college has a member of staff who is specifically working on cyber and its performance within the college. An update to the next committee meeting would be brought.

The committee commented that the presented Data Strategy was a steppingstone to an enhanced view of Cyber Security and asked the college to

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consider as they move forward what their information assets were and where the accountability for data assets sat as cyber security was a business risk not just an IT risk.

It was agreed that previously there had been a significant risk in major data systems being home coded by staff and that that had been a major issue whereas this plan seeks to rebalance that and looks to work with partners

The committee was very supportive of the approach that appears to drive greater efficiency for the future and involves ownership from users.

The update as a whole was noted

## Action Plan

Action No	Action	Completion Date	Owner	Status

***Any student and staff governors were asked to leave the meeting***

**AOB**

**Finance Confidential Item**

*Date of next meeting – 20 June 2023*