

## Finance and General Purposes Committee

### Minutes of Meeting of 7 March 2024

#### Present:

Moira Niven (Chair, Non-executive member)  
Abel Aboh (Non-executive member)  
Aruna Lopez (Non-executive member)  
Alex Linkston (Non-executive member)  
Jackie Galbraith (Principal)  
Karine Bourdarias (Student Association President)

#### In attendance:

Jennifer McLaren (Vice Principal, Finance and Estates)  
Simon Earp (Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement)  
Derek O'Sullivan (Head of HR and People Development)  
Alison Tulloch (HR Business Partner)  
Julia Simpson (Learning and Development Officer)  
Jenny Stalker (Board Secretary and Governance Advisor)

#### Presentation on Staff Wellbeing

A presentation on Staff Wellbeing was given to the committee at the start of the meeting. The committee was given an insight into the staff strategy for Health and Wellbeing, including the physical, mental and financial strands of the strategy.

The committee heard about the various initiatives that staff can benefit from to improve physical, financial and mental wellbeing. These include a range of sports related activities led by the Active Campus Co-ordinator, as well as other initiatives such as the employee assistance programme, flu vaccination vouchers, a menopause café and workshops on preparing for later life working.

The committee noted the toolkits available for staff and managers to manage mental health and noted the Time to Talk initiative. Mental Health Workplace training has been rolled out to all managers, establishing a knowledge baseline across the college.

The committee was given an insight into Wellbeing Wednesday, an annual event introduced in 2021-22 as a virtual event but which we are now able to deliver on campus. The programme for the day included a wide range of taster activities, introducing staff to new things that may be of interest. The programme is linked to feedback from the staff survey and made as relevant to staff needs as possible.

The committee was interested in the main causes of stress for staff. The Head of HR and People Development confirmed that workload concerns are the main stressor for

staff and that this would be discussed as part of the HR report. The committee was also interested to know if the college has identified any wellbeing issues specifically related to ethnic staff groups and noted that none have been identified to date. However, it was agreed that a more targeted approach could be taken to pinpoint wellbeing activities which appeal to ethnic staff groups.

### **Action 1: Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement**

To arrange to survey ethnic staff groups to identify relevant, future activities for Wellbeing Wednesday.

The committee queried the budget allocation for wellbeing support and whether the costs outweigh the benefits in light of current funding challenges. The committee heard that the budget is small and the HR team are able to provide much with little cost involved and no waste. Most activities are run by existing staff incurring little or no cost.

The committee agreed these initiatives are important for staff motivation and help to counteract stressors. The Principal confirmed the college wants to continue to invest in its people and noted that the college gets far more back from staff because of this investment, evidence of which can be seen in the staff survey feedback.

The committee thanked the HR team for a very interesting and informative presentation.

## **1 Committee Administration**

### **1.1 Welcome and Apologies**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Alison Tulloch, HR Business Partner and Julia Simpson, Learning and Development Officer were welcomed to give a presentation on Staff Wellbeing. Alison Tulloch, HR Business Partner, remained for the full meeting as an observer.

The Chair noted this was the last meeting for Karine Bourdarias who will be leaving the college to take up a new job. Karine was congratulated by the committee and wished all the best in her new career.

Apologies were noted from Tony Sharkey, Vice Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, Sarah-Jane Linton, Vice Principal, Learning and Attainment and Fiona Hudson, Head of Finance and Procurement.

### **1.2 Declarations of Conflicts of Interest**

There were no declarations of conflicts of interest.

**1.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting of 23 November 2023**

The minutes of the previous meeting of 23 November 2023 were accepted as a correct record of the meeting.

**1.4 Matters Arising**

The committee noted all actions had been completed.

**2 Matters for Committee Approval**

**2.1 Voluntary Severance Scheme 2023-24**

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates introduced the paper and noted the voluntary severance scheme, if approved by the committee, will be launched on 11 March 2024.

The Committee noted the current financial position and agreed that a reduction in staff costs is necessary to move towards a balanced budget in the next 2-3 years.

The committee was informed about pension strain costs associated with the Lothian Pension Fund in instances where there is an early draw down of pension. Pension strain costs impact on whether a viable business case can be presented and accepted. The committee discussed the illustrative costs for a 6-month and 9-month scheme in the tables presented in the paper. The committee noted that only three colleges are offering a six-months voluntary severance scheme.

The committee discussed the Principal's drop-in sessions and the mood amongst staff when receiving the information around cost savings. The Principal reported the mood has been positive at these meetings and that staff understand the financial difficulties in the sector. The college has continued to emphasise a commitment to avoiding compulsory redundancies.

The committee noted that, where voluntary severance is awarded, the position will not be filled and discussed the challenges for college business with fewer staff.

The committee noted the budget implications and discussed re-training staff as well as looking at re-engineering work practices to avoid overloading remaining staff.

It was confirmed the executive team has started discussions on a strategic workforce plan. The committee agreed that due consideration of individual business cases to remove posts and re-shape the business will be important.

The committee approved the scheme as outlined in the paper with a maximum payment to staff of 9 months salary. The committee also noted the payback period for the scheme would be 12 months.

## **2.2 Industrial Action**

The committee was updated on the extraordinary meeting of the Chairs Committee on 8 February 2024 and the proposal to address actions short of strike which may be taken by lecturers.

The committee discussed the serious impact of withholding student results on students and the additional stress on managers who have to resolve the problem.

The committee agreed withholding results is a breach of contract and the decision to deduct 100% of salary, where this action is taken, is appropriate. The Principal presented the view of the local EIS branch which had been sent on 6 March 2024 to the committee for consideration.

The Principal presented a case for deduction of salary to take effect from the end of block 3. It was confirmed the May down week will be dropped to give more time for lecturers to assess, mark and enter results. Lecturers will be asked if they intend to participate in action short of strike and salary will be deducted from the end of block 3.

The committee agreed this is a reasonable approach and will mean a deduction of salary for one week at the end of block 3r.

The Committee expressed the hope it will not be necessary to take this action and the college can maintain good relations and a position of trust with staff. The Principal endorsed this hope and assured the committee the college is paying close attention to the national situation and to staff morale.

The committee unanimously approved the proposal to deduct 100% of salary per day from Monday 18 June 2024 where a lecturer withholds student results.

## **3 Matters for Committee Attention**

### **3.1 Draft Scottish Government Budget 2024-25**

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates introduced the paper and confirmed we are likely to have an indicative funding allocation by the end of March 2024 and the final funding allocation confirmed in May 2024.

The committee noted the update.

### **3.2 Financial Management**

#### **(i) Management Accounts January 2024**

The Committee noted and discussed the reasons for the deficit forecast. It was confirmed the year end cash position assumes the pay award will be made by the end of July. The committee acknowledged the 3 percentage point increase in the college's SPPA contributions and removal of the Flexible Workforce Development Fund were confirmed after the budget was set.

The Vice Principal, Finance and Estates assured the committee that the cash flow is being monitored on a monthly basis and actions had been agreed by the Executive Leadership Team to reduce expenditure.

The committee noted the latest management accounts forecast.

#### **(ii) Student Funds Update 2023-24**

The committee noted the paper on student funds which included the table on childcare payments as requested at the previous meeting. The committee was content with the information provided.

The committee noted that additional funds of £750,000 was secured by the college which will allow the college to make additional hardship payments.

The committee was pleased to know students will benefit from the additional funds and noted the update.

#### **(iii) Credit Target Update 2023-24**

The committee noted the paper and the forecasted surplus of 750 credits.

### **3.3 Infrastructure Update**

The committee noted the Infrastructure Update and discussed the deferment of the Professional Cookery refurbishment project. The committee noted this decision has been made in full consultation with the managers and staff of that faculty.

The committee agreed this should still be the next material project in terms of estates development.

The committee noted that windows had been installed in Building No 4 as part of the decarbonisation project in February 2024 and the

remainder would be fitted in April 2024 when the project would be complete.

The committee noted the update.

### **3.4 College Pension Contribution Rates**

The Vice Principal Finance and Corporate Services introduced the paper and highlighted a 3-percentage point increase in the SPPA pension contribution rate and a 2-percentage point decrease in the LPF pension contribution rate, both taking effect from 1 April 2024.

### **3.5 HR and People Development Report**

The Head of HR and People Development discussed the results of the staff experience survey. It was noted that feedback is positive and that workload is the main point of concern identified from the survey. The committee was assured the college management team is working to address this.

The committee was pleased to note absence rates are much improved on the same time last year.

The committee discussed the rise in challenging student behaviours and the college response to this. The Principal confirmed additional support staff have been put in place to support lecturing staff and that a RESPECT working group has been established to work to address the issue.

It was highlighted that management of HR will be transferred from the Vice Principal, Finance and Estates to the Vice Principal, People, Performance and Improvement from end February 2024.

The committee noted the report.

### **3.6 Alternative Income Report**

The committee noted the Vice Principal, Learning and Attainment will lead on this report for future meetings. The report was introduced by the faculty director.

The faculty director discussed the Modern Apprenticeship and other contract bids and confirmed that an extension to the Children's' Hearing Contract will be confirmed in April 2024.

The Flexible Workforce Development Fund was noted as ended by the Scottish Government. The college will continue to work West Lothian Council's Economic Development Partnership.

The Committee noted that additional Modern Apprenticeship places have been secured and filled by moving SVQ candidates onto these programmes, positively improving income and providing places for SVQ applicants sitting on a waiting list.

The committee was content with the format of the report and noted the paper.

**4 Matters for Committee Information**

**4.1 College Employers Association Update**

This item had been covered in previous agenda items and there was no further input.

**5 Any Other Business (AOB)**

There was no other business.

**6 Review of Committee and Supporting Papers**

The committee agreed the papers submitted were high quality and provided the committee with clear information.

**7 Date of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee will be held on 13 June commencing at 10.30 am.

**Note: There were no matters discussed during the meeting, during which Members declared a conflict of interest or the Board Secretary and Governance Advisor was aware from the Register of Interests that discussion could give rise to such a conflict.**

Signed: .....

Chair, Finance and General Purposes Committee

Date: .....