

BOARD OF MANAGEMENT



People, Culture and Wellbeing Committee

Thursday 4 September 2025 at 5.00pm **Room K-TO-624, Kingsway Campus** (MS Teams option available)

Minute of the People, Culture and Wellbeing Committee meeting held on Thursday 4 September 2025 at 5.00pm, in Room K-TO-624, Kingsway Campus.

PRESENT:

Donald Mackenzie	Brian Mooney
Brian Lawrie	Robert Young
Carri Cusick	Neil Lowden
Simon Hewitt	Stephen Oakley

IN ATTENDANCE: Steven Taylor (Vice Principal Support Services and Operations)
Sandy Fowler (Health and Safety Officer)
Penny Muir (Board Administrator)
Abi Mawhirt (Head of People and Organisation Development)

1. WELCOME

D Mackenzie welcomed everyone to the People, Culture and Wellbeing Committee meeting and welcomed Brian Mooney to his first meeting.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies received from Billy Grace, Julie Grace and Richard Gordon.

3. DECLARATIONS OF CONNECTION & INTEREST

There were no declarations of connection & interest.

4. MINUTE OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 May 2025 were approved as an accurate record.

5. MATTERS ARISING

There are no matters arising.

6. FINANCIAL SECURITY & SAVINGS UPDATE

S Hewitt reported that finances remained extremely tight and challenging, not only at Dundee and Angus College but across the sector nationally. The overall financial outlook was described as grim, with the College not immune from these pressures.

Action taken previously had created some short-term breathing space, but pressures such as pay increases and unfunded national insurance rises were beginning to put significant strain on the budget.

For 2025/26, the initial budget projections indicated a potential deficit of £2.3 million, largely due to a £1.3 million pay award and unfunded NI costs of nearly £0.5 million. While an uplift of 2.8% in Scottish Government funding had been confirmed, it was insufficient to offset the additional cost pressures.

Recruitment performance was reported as positive overall, but growth had occurred in the 'wrong' areas. The College had experienced a decline in Higher National numbers, with a reduction of c200 learners, many of whom had instead accepted clearing offers at universities. This represented an additional financial shortfall, creating a significant impact on income and student credits. S Hewitt noted that further modelling work was required to establish the true position, but savings would be unavoidable to ensure the College remained financially stable.

National sector data indicated that of the 22 colleges fully funded by the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), 16 were projected to run out of cash by 2028. S Hewitt described this as a harsh reality, reinforcing the need for control, solutions, and new ways of working. Staff remained hopeful about the future but were concerned about the risk of the College slipping back into crisis. He acknowledged this uncertainty but noted that the College was well experienced in navigating such challenges, having developed resilience and effective processes over the years.

S Taylor confirmed that the financial outlook was becoming clearer. An expected upturn had not materialised, making communication with staff and unions essential to ensure transparency and consultation. He recognised the difficulty of balancing a future vision and credit targets while reducing staffing, as this inevitably impacted student numbers. Nonetheless, he stated it was important to move quickly and outlined an initial timeline for implementation running up to Christmas 2025, with discussions to be tied into the forthcoming meeting with the SFC.

S Hewitt highlighted further challenges regarding the Voluntary Severance (VS) arrangements. While the College had historically been able to fund VS schemes, these now placed increasing pressure on cash reserves, which had fallen from £6 million in 2021 to £4 million in the most recent financial year. He stressed that this was not unique to Dundee and Angus, with national statistics showing similar difficulties across the sector.

In discussion, D Mackenzie queried the destination of students lost to universities and whether this reflected changing preferences. S Hewitt explained that both local universities had gone to clearing across almost all courses, with some lowering entry requirements in ways the College was not comfortable to match. With fewer young people overall and growing competition, this presented a structural challenge which government intervention would be required to address.

N Lowden noted the steep decline in tuition fee income, which had reduced from a projection of £3.8 million in 2021/22 to £2.5 million in the current year. S Hewitt confirmed that this was the impact of declining HN numbers.

D Mackenzie asked whether there was an appetite for structural reform across the sector, but S Hewitt responded that no such developments were likely before the next election.

B Lawrie observed that the commentary was striking, with a number of colleges reportedly on a financial "watch list." He highlighted that the loss of 200 students to universities, while not necessarily the best option for them, created significant financial pressures for the College. He asked whether staffing reductions, the largest cost driver, would impact curriculum delivery. In response, S Hewitt advised that it was the role of the College to avoid this where possible.

S Hewitt noted that against this position there were 14 colleges projected to run out of cash by 2027, with nine already considering campus closures in 2027/28.

R Young queried the existence of a “watch list” and whether there was a trigger point for further SFC intervention.

S Hewitt confirmed that the Scottish Funding Council monitored such matters, but once a college was placed on the list, decisions risked being moved beyond its control. He reiterated the importance of maintaining transparency with staff during this period of uncertainty.

S Oakley expressed concern at yet another period of uncertainty. He stressed that the trade union’s position was not to oppose the College but to hold the Scottish Government and the SFC accountable.

C Cusick asked about the purpose of the forthcoming meeting with SFC. S Hewitt explained that the meeting would set out the College’s position on its credit target, clarifying that while a £4 million reduction had been permitted, activity levels had to be maintained, with the aim to articulate the financial position and the future vision for the College.

S Oakley expressed concern that deterioration in the quality of provision might result from financial pressures. S Hewitt acknowledged this risk but emphasised the need to do things differently, noting that national participation measures were already at rock bottom.

Further discussion noted the mixed messages arising around redundancies, with S Taylor stressing the need to find sustainable solutions and to work with the SFC for short-term flexibility to deliver longer term sustainability. He cautioned that many colleges were already operating at the edge of their budgets, effectively borrowing against future funding making recovery difficult without an even more severe plan.

D Mackenzie concluded that while the challenges were severe, the College had faced and overcome similar pressures in the past.

D Mackenzie thanked S Hewitt for the update.

7. PEOPLE, CULTURE & WELLBEING REPORT

S Taylor presented his People, Culture & Wellbeing Report, he noted that voluntary severance costs in the previous year had been higher than forecasted. This was due to the staffing reductions within the Sports Centre and the Service Academy which had now been progressed and were complete.

S Taylor highlighted the recent staff awards, remarking that the student-voted awards were particularly powerful in recognising and celebrating staff contributions. He also referred to the recent All Staff Day, which had been a challenging but impactful event. The programme, which included a presentation by Fiona Drouet on the “Emily Test,” was described as powerful and had prompted reflection and action across the organisation. Engagement levels were very strong, and feedback from staff had been highly positive.

In terms of follow-up work, S Taylor reported significant progress in developing activity linked to the Emily Test, with many connections established with local organisations to secure support. He noted that the College had considered the related Charter but, given the number of charters already in circulation, had not yet signed it. A group had been convened to review the matter further.

S Oakley expressed his belief that the College should sign the Charter. S Taylor responded that the review would continue before a final decision was made.

D Mackenzie asked whether the “Just One Hour” initiative had impacted overall of staff wellbeing and if this could be evidenced.

S Taylor noted that a direct correlation was difficult to establish, but that interest in activities and feedback from staff of the benefits had been strong. S Taylor explained that a working group on health and wellbeing had also been established, and feedback from participants showed a significant positive shift. Staff response had been strong and encouraging.

S Oakley questioned if data could be provided to evidence this link and to support the continuation of the initiative.

C Cusick noted with interest that some former employees from the Service Design Academy had established their own business. S Taylor confirmed this and added that the College had supported the process by transferring the relevant intellectual property and materials.

D Mackenzie welcomed the report.

8. NATIONAL BARGAINING UPDATE

S Taylor advised that the multi-year agreement had enabled progress in several areas for academic staff.

The pay award discussions for support staff were moving forward, although negotiations had been paused pending confirmation of funding support from the Scottish Government. Once funding was confirmed, the agreement would be issued to employees for acceptance.

S Taylor reported that the national job evaluation project had recommenced following changes in personnel and to the project plan. Although the project remained complex, the revised arrangements provided a greater likelihood of success. The Government had confirmed that funding for the project continued to be available and would be released upon implementation. The initiative aimed to establish clarity and consistency in how job evaluation was undertaken across the sector, with a standardised framework for assessing roles. Arrangements were also being progressed to use an independent third party to support the evaluation process.

In discussion, C Cusick queried whether the project could impact the salary budget. S Taylor confirmed that Government funding had been allocated for this purpose but noted that the detail would still require further negotiation. He added that national discussions on a wider agreement were ongoing.

S Taylor noted discussions nationally around changes to the national recognition and procedure agreement and stated that a technical decision of the Board might be required once the proposals were finalised.

D Mackenzie praised the report.

9. HEALTH & SAFETY ANNUAL REPORT

S Fowler provided an overview of activity over the past 12 months, during which a wide range of services had been delivered. These included one-to-one training sessions, training for caretaker teams, and the delivery of a number of group sessions. Positive feedback had been received from participants, and statistical reporting demonstrated a growing awareness of health and safety matters.

S Fowler confirmed that recent fire evacuation exercises across all three campuses had been successfully completed, with safe evacuation achieved in each instance. With regards to first aid provision, S Fowler advised that there were currently 62 trained first aiders. He acknowledged that the shift to more home and hybrid working had created challenges in maintaining coverage, but efforts continued to recruit and train additional volunteers to ensure provision remained in place.

S Fowler reported the launch of the “See It, Hear It, Say It” campaign, which included a transition to new A3 signage covering fire action, first aid, and near-miss hazard reporting. The campaign was designed to streamline processes and included the introduction of campus-specific QR codes for first aid contacts. S Fowler stated these would be displayed across each campus to improve accessibility and address user frustrations.

In terms of health and safety performance, S Fowler highlighted that 29 accidents and 300 near misses had been recorded in the reporting period.

RIDDOR incidents had reduced from seven in the previous year to two in the current year, reflecting positive progress. However, accidents overall had increased by 43%. He noted that while incident numbers had risen, these had not typically resulted in extended staff absence, and the College’s campaign efforts appeared to be moving in the right direction.

B Lawrie observed that the progress charts were particularly helpful and expressed support for the introduction of the QR system for first aid access. He enquired whether community first response provision was available, and S Fowler confirmed that CPR training had been delivered.

B Lawrie further sought clarification on the PEEP report, noting that Gardyne Campus had 33 Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans. S Fowler explained that this figure reflected the number of supported education students on the Gardyne campus who were unable to use lifts during an emergency.

D Mackenzie queried the categorisation of verbal assault. S Fowler explained that such cases related to incidents where students with underlying issues had directed inappropriate or derogatory language towards staff or other students. These were recorded and processed in line with procedure.

S Oakley noted the increase in incidents reported during February and March. S Fowler confirmed this was under review, explaining that it was likely linked to unfamiliarity with new tasks following the change of semester and January starts.

R Young remarked that S Fowler’s enthusiasm was infectious, and S Hewitt endorsed this, thanking S Fowler for his commitment and approach.

10. STRATEGIC RISK REGISTER

S Taylor reported that no changes were proposed.

D Mackenzie raised the matter of updating Committee names on the Risk Register, and S Taylor confirmed this would be reviewed. **S Taylor to progress.**

11. HR METRICS

S Taylor highlighted this report for noting.

He stated that the cyber training completion rate had increased over the course of the year, with current figures sitting close to 100%.

B Lawrie suggested that Section Two of the report could benefit from an extended reporting period, potentially 15 months, to allow for improved trend comparisons. **S Taylor agreed to review this proposal.**

The Committee noted that the timeline associated with the financial position required ongoing management. S Taylor confirmed that regular updates on savings plans would be provided to the Committee, incorporating lessons learned from prior initiatives.

B Mooney requested additional detail regarding the overall strategy. In response, S Hewitt outlined the workforce implications, including potential changes to headcount, noting that some adjustments were linked to curriculum requirements. While the workforce plan addressed these implications, accurate forecasting could be challenging until enrolment data was confirmed.

A holistic approach to cost management was discussed. S Taylor explained that in 2023, focus had been given to curriculum areas, alongside a 10% reduction in Scottish Funding Council allocations, requiring review across the entire College.

Challenges relating to credit targets and the impact of staff reductions were acknowledged. D Mackenzie emphasised the importance of maintaining cohesion and keeping staff engaged, while S Oakley stressed the need to ensure that the College remained capable of delivering for its students. The Committee recognised that lessons learned from this holistic approach should inform consideration of the current organisational structure.

B Lawrie highlighted the importance of transparency regarding voluntary severance arrangements, noting that these had been well documented. He observed that the College was in a positive position and emphasised that the Board's role was to challenge itself to ensure all stakeholders were appropriately considered.

D Mackenzie thanked S Taylor for the report.

12. MEETING MINUTES/UPDATES

The Joint Consultative Committee (JCF) and Health, Safety and Wellbeing (HS&W) minutes were noted.

13. POINTS TO RAISE AT THE BOARD

D Mackenzie noted that he was keen to identify any points at the end of the meeting that may need to be raised at the Board meeting.

The Committee noted that the timeline associated with the financial position required ongoing management. S Taylor confirmed that regular updates on savings plans would be provided to the Board and to each Committee.

B Mooney asked about the detail regarding the overall workforce plan and strategy. In response, S Taylor outlined the workforce implications, including potential changes to headcount, noting that some adjustments were linked to curriculum requirements. While the workforce plan addressed these implications, accurate forecasting could be challenging until enrolment data was confirmed.

A holistic approach to cost management was discussed. S Taylor explained that in 2023, focus had been given to curriculum areas, alongside a 10% reduction in Scottish Funding Council allocations, requiring review across the entire College.

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D Mackenzie emphasised the importance of maintaining cohesion and keeping staff engaged, while S Oakley stressed the need to ensure that the College remained capable of delivering for its students. The Committee recognised that lessons learned from this holistic approach should inform consideration of the current organisational challenges.

B Lawrie highlighted the importance of transparency regarding voluntary severance arrangements, noting that these had been well documented in some organisations reported recently. He observed that the College was in a positive position and emphasised that the Board's role was to challenge itself to ensure all stakeholders were appropriately considered.

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Thursday 20 November 2020 at 5.00pm in K-TO-624, Kingsway Campus

Action Point Summary

Action	Responsibility	Date
Review and update Committee names on the Risk Register.	S Taylor	20 November 2025
Consider the possibility of extending the HR metrics reporting period to 15 months to allow for improved trend comparison.	S Taylor	20 November 2025