SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body** of **South West College**
held on Wednesday 15 April 2026 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus

PRESENT:	Mrs Libby Armstrong Mr Michael Barnett Dr Frances Campbell Mr Tom Corr Dr David Cutting Mrs Maria Hackett Mr Brian Ingram Mrs Sandra Isherwood Mr Ryan Kearney Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive Ms Anne McCleary (*via MS Teams*) Mrs Gillian McDowell (*from item 5.0*) (*via MS Teams*) Dr Nichola Melanaphy (*via MS Teams*) Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams*)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer Mrs Janis Scallon, Director of Further Education, DfE (*items 5.0 & 6.0*)
APOLOGIES:	Mrs Maureen Brunt

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present.

An apology was tendered on behalf of Mrs Brunt and it was noted that Mrs McDowell and Mrs Scallon would join the meeting at a later juncture.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Dr Quinn declared her employment with the Open University, Dr Cutting declared his employment with Queens University Belfast and Mrs Armstrong declared her position as a board member of the Labour Relations Agency and a panel member of the Fair Employment and Industrial Tribunals NI.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 — Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 4 February 2026.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Armstrong and seconded by Mr Corr, that the above minutes be accepted as a true and accurate record. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

4.0 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Articles of Government.

Death of Mrs Deborah Brown – Dr O'Shiel paid tribute to Mrs Deborah Brown, former colleague and governor, acknowledging in particular her contribution to the Governing Body and her leadership during a challenging period. Ms McCartan spoke of the tributes paid to Mrs Brown within the College to date as well as those planned.

Co-option – Dr O'Shiel apprised the meeting of the forthcoming end of the term of office of a co-opted member and sought delegated authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive and the Secretary to the Governing Body to progress the co-option of a member to the Governing Body to fill the pending vacancy.

AGREED: to delegate authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chief Executive and the Secretary to the Governing Body to progress the co-option of a member to the Governing Body.

Articles of Government – Dr O'Shiel reported his approval of the Articles of Government in paper 04.01, amended to reflect the change of the College's financial year, under his authority to take decisions between Governing Body meetings.

Governor Vacancies – Dr O'Shiel advised of an update from the Department for the Economy (DfE) on the anticipated timeframes for the commencement of recruitment exercises to fill current vacancies in the Governing Body and to appoint a successor Chair of the Governing Body.

Mrs Scallon joined the meeting at this juncture and a round of self-introductions were made.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Accountability Meeting Presentation.

Strategic Projects:

- **Mid Ulster Lean Learning Factory Project –** Ms McCartan reported good progress in the development of the Mid Ulster Lean Learning Factory Project, commented on the likely support provided to it by the Mid Ulster District Council Local Economic Partnership and spoke of the potential for supplementary developments.
- **Decarbonisation, Innovation & Skills for Concrete Centre (DISC) Project** – Ms McCartan advised of the advanced and iterative nature of the Outline Business Case for the DISC Project, noting the commitment within the Heads of Terms of the Mid South West Growth Deal as well as the uncertainty around its current status.
- **Special Educational Needs Project** – Ms McCartan reported the ongoing implementation of the Special Educational Needs – Student Engagement (SEN-SE) project and apprised the meeting of discussions held with DfE and other partners on longer term strategies.

Students – Ms McCartan advised of the focus placed on examinations and assessments in the third term of the academic year. She also drew attention to the significant range of achievements of South West College (SWC) students in skills competitions and other activities and presented a video slide showcasing some recent student successes.

Accountability Meeting – Ms McCartan spoke of the recent Accountability Meeting with DfE and referenced the slides presented at this meeting in paper 05.01.

SWC Live Data Dashboard – Ms McCartan provided a demonstration of the live student data dashboard and members commented on the value of the information within in oversight and performance management.

Mrs McDowell joined the meeting at this juncture.

2026/27 Budget – Ms McCartan reminded members of the NI government and departmental budget challenges outlined by the DfE Permanent Secretary during his meeting with the Governing Body in March 2026. She confirmed that a budget allocation has not yet been provided and sought authority to commit routine expenditure pending clarity on and approval of the 2026/27 budget.

AGREED: authorisation to commit expenditure pending approval of the 2026/27 budget.

FE Reform Programme - Ms McCartan outlined the strands of the Further Education (FE) Reform Programme, noting its official launch the previous day and the forthcoming bilateral engagement planned between the Director of FE Reform and SWC.

6.0 DFE BRIEFING

Mrs Scallon began by thanking the Governing Body for its invitation to address the meeting and, acknowledging her recent appointment to her role, by outlining her professional background. She spoke of her appreciation of the value and impact of the FE sector and of the need to disseminate this to a wider audience. She also spoke of her role in supporting the FE sector, advised of the current challenging budget position at NI government level and paid tribute to Ms McCartan for her work as Chair of the FE Principals' Group.

A discussion then followed during which the following points were raised:

- The value of the development of a sectoral vision for the FE sector and a drive to raise awareness of the scope of provision and outcomes of the sector;
- The College's contribution to the achievement of the four pillars within the DfE Economic Vision of Good Jobs, Regional Balance, Raised Productivity and Reduced Carbon Emissions;
- The need for sectoral input into the review of the FE funding model as well as the importance of its reflection of the relative cost of delivery of STEM programmes and the potential to incorporate a social value indicator;
- The importance of fairness and the consideration of relative efficiency in the application of any forthcoming budget reductions within the sector;
- The role of the FE sector in providing effective support and programmes for the rising volume of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN); and
- The high cost of the administrative burden placed on colleges and the need for a review of the Partnership Agreement to reflect the principle of proportionate autonomy.

Mr Corr, Mr Kearney, Ms McCartan, Mr McNamee, Dr Melanaphy and Mrs Nugent withdrew from the meeting at this juncture and the meeting went into reserved session.

Mrs Scallon withdrew from the meeting on conclusion of the reserved session and Mr Corr, Mr Kearney, Ms McCartan, Mr McNamee, Dr Melanaphy and Mrs Nugent rejoined the meeting.

7.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 18 February 2026 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 07.03 2024-25 Annual Report and Financial Statements
- Paper 07.04 Report to Those Charged with Governance 2024-25
- Paper 07.05 Social Media Policy
- Paper 07.06 Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Paper 07.07 Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Management Policy
- Paper 07.08 Information Governance Policy
- Paper 07.09 Mobile Device Management Policy
- Paper 07.10 Records Management Policy.

Reporting on the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 18 February 2026, Mr Ingram, Committee Chair, referenced the 2024/25 Report to Those Charged with Governance received by the Committee, confirmed the implementation of the two recommendations within and noted commencement of work on the Annual Report & Financial Statements to 31 March 2026.

He also reported good progress in the delivery of the 2025/26 Internal Audit Plan; commented on the effective management of corporate risks; confirmed that no instances of fraud were identified; advised of the presentation received on a deep dive of the risks associated with Information Technology, noting the continuing need for close management of such risks; and highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Social Media Policy, the Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy, the Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Management Policy, the Information Governance Policy, the Mobile Device Management Policy and the Records Management Policy.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Dr Cutting, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting and the recommendations within. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

8.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 25 February 2026 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Redeployment Policy.

Referencing the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 25 February 2026, Mrs Armstrong, Committee Chair, highlighted the Committee's endorsement of the advanced draft of the revised People Plan, the concerns raised on the potential ramifications of the possible non-completion of all four strands of the lecturers' pay agreement within the timeframe of the current deal, and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Redeployment Policy.

Ms McCartan explained that the amended People Plan will be presented at the May 2026 Staffing Committee meeting and reported significant activity in relation to several strands of the lecturers' pay agreement.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Armstrong, seconded by Mrs Isherwood, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendation within. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

9.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 11 March 2026 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Revised 2025/26 Budget Allocation
- Paper 09.03 Financial Management Report to 31 January 2026
- Paper 09.04 Energy Management Policy
- Paper 09.05 Hospitality & Gifts Policy.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, explained that a balanced budget out-turn to 31 March 2026 had been predicted at the committee meeting held on 11 March 2026 and advised that financial management continues on the basis of an estimated budget in the absence of a confirmed 2026/27 budget allocation. He also commented on the challenges presented by the inability to accrue significant costs into subsequent accounting periods and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Energy Management Policy and the Hospitality & Gifts Policy.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Dr Cutting, adoption of the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

10.0 CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of 18 March 2026 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 Higher Education Assessment Appeals Policy
- Paper 10.03 Further Education / Work Based Learning Centre Assessment Policy
- Paper 10.04 Fitness to Practice Policy.

Mrs Isherwood, Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee, began her account of the committee meeting held on 18 March 2026, by providing an overview of the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues, noting the positive indicators reported in relation to the learner experience, the growing demand for SEN provision, the impact of enhanced mentor support in Essential Skills success rates and the progress of the College's strategic projects. She also commented on the good performance against 2025/26 enrolment targets, accommodation pressures, the continued uncertainty on the future funding position of the Going Places and Rural Economic Accelerator Programme (REAP), and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Higher Education Assessment Appeals Policy, the Further Education / Work Based Learning Centre Assessment Policy and the Fitness to Practice Policy.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Mrs Hackett, adoption of the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

11.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Dr Cutting commented on the value of the Governing Body site visit to the College's Welding Training Facility and encouraged further visits to other college facilities.

13.0 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 13 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that all actions listed had been addressed including the appointment of Mrs Isherwood to the Task & Finish Group for the Future Design of an Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Enabled College.

14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members acknowledged the value of the discussion held with the Director of FE, DfE.

The meeting concluded at 8:05 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE 2026

GB CHAIRPERSON ____________________________________ **DATE** ___________________