

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 10 September 2025 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Erne Campus

PRESENT:

Mrs Libby Armstrong
Mr Michael Barnett
Mrs Maureen Brunt
Dr Frances Campbell (*via MS Teams*)
Mr Tom Corr
Dr David Cutting (*via MS Teams*)
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Mrs Gillian McDowell (*via MS Teams*)
Dr Nichola Melanaphy
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
Dr Lynsey Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mr Padraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer (*via MS Teams*)

APOLOGIES:

Ms Anne McCleary

1.0 PRELIMINARIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present and by thanking Mr Ingram for presiding over the previous meeting.

An apology was tendered on behalf of Ms McCleary.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made at this point.

At later stages of the meeting Mrs Hackett declared her employment with Open College Network NI and Mrs Armstrong declared her professional connection with the Convener through their membership of the Board of the Labour Relations Agency NI.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 18 JUNE 2025

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 18 June 2025.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Mr Ingram, that the above minutes are 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

Meetings with the Department for the Economy (DfE) – Dr O'Shiel reported on his recent meeting with the Minister for the Economy, commenting on the Minister's focus on the College's governance structure, the Governing Body's awareness of college matters and its commitment to increasing student numbers, managing costs and enhancing quality. He also reported on his recent meeting with the Director of Further Education (FE) and provided an update on the structure and key roles within DfE's FE Division.

College Employers' Forum (CEF) – Dr O'Shiel updated members on CEF meetings held over the Summer months, noting the advanced development of the revised CEF constitution, the engagements with the newly appointed Convener and the ongoing discussions on the voluntary nature of CEF membership.

Committee Chairs' Meeting – Dr O'Shiel reported on a recent meeting involving committee chairs, the Chair of the Governing Body and the Chief Executive.

Annual Assessment of Performance – Dr O'Shiel confirmed the commencement of appraisal meetings with governors as part of the Annual Performance Assessment Process.

Governor Vacancies – Dr O'Shiel advised of his communications with DfE on the requirement for a commencement of a recruitment exercise to fill the vacancies in the Governing Body.

5.0 2025/26 BUDGET UPDATE

Ms McCartan reminded governors of the cash deficit shown in the draft 2025/26 budget presented to the Governing Body at its June 2025 meeting. She explained that additional predicted income and savings identified in the interim had reduced this deficit by circa £500k and that further reductions are likely following clarity on potential income streams. She added that finance department resource is currently focused on the development of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements, due to be lodged with the NI Audit Office for audit at the month end, and that a comprehensive budget update will be provided to the Finance & General Purposes Committee at its October 2025 meeting.

Dr O'Shiel spoke of his comfort with the current budget position and Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, commended staff for the reduction in the budget deficit to date.

6.0 2025/26 COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Draft 2025/26 College Development Plan.

With reference to the draft 2025/26 College Development Plan (CDP) in paper 07.01, Ms McCartan outlined the CDP development process, noting that it is at an advanced stage, and presented an overview of the planned delivery for 2025/26, highlighting the proposed 3.8% increase in target enrolments compared with the 2024/25 target. She

welcomed feedback on the draft CDP through the Secretary to the Governing Body and suggested that authority is delegated to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee and the Chief Executive to review and approve the final 2025/26 CDP in advance of the November 2025 Governing Body meeting, if required.

Dr O'Shiel commented on the challenging enrolment target proposed and on the role played by all sections of the College in recruiting and retaining students in the attainment of this target. He commended the draft 2025/26 CDP as a comprehensive overview of college activity and welcomed the enhanced level of scrutiny by DfE.

In response to a query on the reduced level of funding for disability support in the Apprenticeship NI programme, management outlined the revised arrangements for the provision of support for students with disabilities in the new Apprenticeship NI contract, provided assurance on the College's continued commitment to supporting students as required, and undertook to update members on the outcome of a challenge to the reduced funding levels initiated by a number of colleges in the sector.

ACTION: Management to update members on the outcome of a challenge to the reduced funding levels for disability support within the Apprenticeship NI programme.

In response to a query on the utilisation of artificial intelligence (AI) in the administration of support for students, Ms McCartan outlined the staff development provided to date on the application of AI as well as the related research and testing underway through the Special Educational Needs and Student Experience (SENSE) project. She commented on the benefits of AI in the College context and on the importance of close monitoring of its outputs, and undertook to circulate a summary of AI training and developments undertaken to date as well as those planned in the forthcoming period. It was suggested that committees may consider the identification of AI as a key strategic issue for close monitoring.

ACTION: Management to circulate a summary of AI developments undertaken and planned.

AGREED: that authority is delegated to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee and the Chief Executive to review and approve the final 2025/26 CDP in advance of the November 2025 Governing Body meeting, if required.

7.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Chief Executive's Update
- Paper 05.01 DfE Letter on College Strategic Plans
- Paper 05.02 Letter on Acquisition of Dalmore ref PFI.

With the aid of the PowerPoint presentation in paper 05, Ms McCartan provided a comprehensive briefing on the status of key college matters. She began by reminding the meeting of the four priorities within the College's Strategic Plan 2025-28 and by outlining the framework for the delivery of the associated objectives and commitments within. She went on to detail recent, current and predicted enrolment statistics and provide an update on quality improvement activities including the development of a Traineeship Action Plan and the formalisation of the Essential Skills Action Plan. She also outlined the practical outworkings of the agreed steady state approach for 2025/26, provided an overview of progress in sectoral collaboration and industrial relations

matters and confirmed the re-opening of the training and preparatory kitchens in the Erne campus following satisfactory resolution of the issues encountered within.

In response to questions and comments from members, Ms McCartan spoke of her satisfaction with enrolments in 2025/26 to date, acknowledged the anticipated impact of birth rate decline on enrolments in future years, apprised the meeting of the positive impact of the rigorous implementation of the Essential Skills Action Plan on Essential Skills success rates and undertook to extend the Governing Body's congratulations to the staff involved in this achievement, and noted the high retention rate of students affected by the issues in the Erne campus kitchens. Members also commented on the value of the comprehensive and candid briefing provided.

Referencing papers 05.01 and 05.02, Ms McCartan confirmed the College's adherence to the guidance provided on the development of the College's Strategic Plan 2025-28 and advised of the acquisition of the Dalmore Group by Royal London noting the lack of practical impact on the College's PFI contracts.

ACTION: Management to extend the Governing Body's congratulations to the staff involved in increasing the Essential Skills success rate.

8.0 PROJECTS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Projects Oversight Committee Terms of Reference.

Dr Campbell recommended the Terms of Reference of the Project Oversight Committee for adoption.

It was noted that project risk registers will be presented to both the Audit & Risk Committee and the Projects Oversight Committee.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the Projects Oversight Committee Terms of Reference.

9.0 STANDING ORDERS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Standing Orders.

Mrs McCauley drew attention to the minor changes made to the Governing Body's Standing Orders.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt, seconded by Mr Ingram, adoption of the Governing Body's Standing Orders.

10.0 GOVERNANCE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Review of 2024/25 Governance Key Performance Indicators
- Paper 10.02 GB Demonstration of College Values
- Paper 10.03 Proposed 2025/26 Governance Key Performance Indicators.

With reference to paper 10.01, Mrs McCauley explained that a review of the Governing Body's performance against its 2024/25 Governance Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been undertaken where a factual response was available. With respect to the

remaining question, members agreed that the Governing Body had demonstrated its practical implementation of college values.

The proposed 2025/26 Governance KPIs were then adopted and it was noted that the Chair may consider additional meetings to manage the duration of meetings if necessary.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the proposed 2025/26 Governance KPIs.

11.0 REGISTER OF INTERESTS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Register of Governors' Interests.

Mrs McCauley explained that the Register of Governors' Interests had been tabled as required under the Instrument of Government and requested timely notification of any changes in governors' interests during the 2025/26 year.

12.0 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12.01 Partnership Agreement.

Mrs McCauley referenced the Partnership Agreement tabled for the attention of governors as required under the Partnership Agreement and noted that an Annual Engagement Plan for 2025/26 is expected from DfE in September 2025.

13.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 13.01 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that all actions listed have been addressed.

14.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations of hospitality or gifts were made.

15.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

16.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Mrs McCauley acknowledged the technical difficulties encountered with the MS Teams connection and undertook to raise the matter with the IT Team to mitigate the risk of reoccurrence.

The meeting concluded at 7:30 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 NOVEMBER 2025

GB CHAIRPERSON



DATE 19/11/2025

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	10/09/2025	6.0	Management to update members on the outcome of a challenge to the reduced funding levels for disability support within the Apprenticeship NI programme.
2	10/09/2025	6.0	Management to circulate a summary of AI developments undertaken and planned.
3	10/09/2025	7.0	Management to extend the Governing Body's congratulations to the staff involved in increasing the Essential Skills success rate.