

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on **Wednesday 24 June 2026** at 5:30 pm in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

PRESENT: Mr Michael Barnett (*via MS Teams*) (joined at 6.00 pm)
Mrs Maureen Brunt
Dr Frances Campbell
Mr Tom Corr
Dr David Cutting
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood (*via MS Teams*)
Mr Ryan Kearney
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Ms Anne McCleary (*via MS Teams*) (joined at 5.38 pm)
Mrs Gillian McDowell
Dr Nichola Melanaphy
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
Dr Lynsey Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE: Mr Pdraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer

APOLOGIES: Mrs Libby Armstrong

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

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

An apology was tendered on behalf of Mrs Armstrong, and it was noted that Mr Barnett and Ms McCleary would join the meeting at a later juncture.

The Chair referred to Mr Kearney, Student Governor, and expressed appreciation for his valued contribution to the Governing Body, wishing him every success in his future studies.

The Chair thanked Ms Nugent for deputising in the absence of Ms McCauley.

AGREED: permission to record the meeting.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Dr Quinn declared her employment with the Open University.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 15 April 2026.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt 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.

Ms McCleary joined at this juncture

4.0 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 11 June 2026 – DfE – CEF – Independent Convenor.

Dr O'Shiel acknowledged the work of the College, staff and Governing Body over the academic year, noting the strong performance achieved despite a challenging external environment.

Dr O'Shiel provided an update in relation to Governing Body, Chair and Student Governor recruitment. Members noted that engagement with the Department for the Economy (DfE) remains ongoing, with processes progressing and further clarity on timescales awaited. It was also noted that recruitment to the Student Governor position will recommence in September, with consideration to be given to an earlier recruitment cycle to support effective transition and continuity.

Dr O'Shiel drew members' attention to recent correspondence from DfE confirming the extension of the appointment of the Independent Convenor to the College Employers' Forum (04.01), noting the importance of continued engagement at sector level on workforce and industrial relations matters.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 5 June 2026 – DfE – Deputy Secretary for the Skills and Education Group
- Paper 05.02 12 June 2026 – DfE – FE Fit for the Future – Curriculum Strand – Draft Terms of Reference and College Participants
- Paper 05.03 SEN-SE Project Update.

Ms McCartan provided an update on performance with reference to the SWC Live Power BI dashboard, advising that current enrolments over 23,000 and learners over 14,000 for the 2025/26 year which was broadly comparable with 2024/25 and in excess of CDP targets. Members noted that the dashboard provides real-time insight into performance and is accessible to Governors via the Gateway.

It was further noted that similar dashboard approaches are being extended to funded project activity, supporting oversight of key funded programmes, through live financial and KPI reporting. In discussion, it was suggested that consideration be given to development of a consolidated high-level dashboard for Governance purposes.

Ms McCartan reported positively on recent student events, including the Celebration of Success ceremonies, noting the significant impact of these events in recognising student achievement and promoting the work of the College. Reference was also made to the forthcoming College Yearbook, which captures key activities and achievements across the academic year.

The Governing Body noted the contribution of staff across the College throughout the

year, including recent staff engagement events and long service recognition and support to Principal.

Ms McCartan updated members on recent correspondence and engagement with the DfE on the recent appointment of a Deputy Secretary for the Skills and Education Group and the continued focus on collaborative engagement with the FE sector.

An update was also provided in relation to the FE: Fit for the Future reform programme, noting the College's response to initial proposals.

Ms McCartan highlighted the continued uncertainty in relation to the 2026/27 budget, noting that in the absence of an agreed NI Executive budget, the College has been issued with a contingency allocation based on 94% of the previous year's opening budget. Members noted the significant implications of this position for curriculum planning, staffing, learner support and overall financial sustainability.

The draft College Development Plan for 2026/27 was noted in the context of this uncertainty, requiring a careful balance between responsible planning within confirmed resources and maintaining flexibility should additional funding become available.

Mr Barnett joined the meeting at this juncture.

Ms McCartan reported that work is continuing on the Mid Ulster Lean Learning factory project, with funding flows and partnership structures. Ms McCartan advised that progress on the concrete/construction decarbonisation project had paused but consideration of potential funding sources remained open.

Mr McNamee provided a project report on the SEN-SE project previously endorsed the Governing Body in December 2024. Members noted the significant progress made to date, including extensive student feedback and engagement, and the increasing demand and complexity of need across provision. Mr McNamee outlined the key findings, advising that alignment with emerging Departmental expectations has been considered. He highlighted the need for a more structured and coherent model, including a single point of accountability for inclusive learning, to strengthen strategic oversight, support clear escalation pathways, enhance multi-agency collaboration and ensure a more robust and compliant system.

In discussion, members supported the proposal to move towards a more strategic, whole-college inclusive learning approach, aligned to trauma-informed practice, recognising its importance in supporting both SEN learners and the wider student population. Consideration was also given to the need to manage expectations within available capacity and resources.

AGREED: in principle, to progress development of a coordinated and inclusive SEN model, including the establishment of a dedicated leadership/coordinating role.

Members recorded their appreciation to Ms McElholm, Project Lead, for the comprehensive work undertaken.

In summary, members noted that the College continues to demonstrate strong performance across student recruitment, delivery and stakeholder engagement, supported by committed staff and ongoing improvements in data and reporting

capability during the 2026/27 year.

AGREED: that delegated authority be granted to the Chair or Vice Chair, in consultation with the Principal & CEO, to act on behalf of the Governing Body during the summer period, with any decisions reported to the next meeting of the Governing Body.

6.0 PROJECT OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Minutes of 22 April 2026 Project Oversight Committee Meeting.

Reporting on the Project Oversight Committee meeting held on 22 April 2026, the Committee Chair highlighting the complexity and scale of project delivery, with reference also made to engagement at sector events. The Governing Body commended management for the work being undertaken.

The Committee Chair confirmed that the proposed schedule of meetings for 2026/27 includes two meetings and that all outstanding actions have been addressed.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell, seconded by Mr Kearney, adoption of the minutes of the Project Oversight Committee meeting. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

7.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 13 May 2026 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 People Plan 2025-2029
- Paper 07.03 Equality Scheme.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on 13 May 2026, Dr Cutting, in the Committee Chair's absence, provided an overview of the updates received on key strategic issues across culture and engagement, staff recruitment and retention, the People Plan and industrial relations. Members were advised that the Committee had considered the final version of the People Plan 2025-2029 and recognised it as providing a clear and credible framework to support people priorities and long-term workforce sustainability. The Committee recommended the People Plan 2025-2029 to the Governing Body for approval.

It was reported that the Equality Scheme had been recommended to the Governing Body for approval and that the Stress Management and Support Policy was held pending Trade Union feedback.

Ms McCartan provided an update on the Employee Engagement Survey, with members noting a marked improvement in staff awareness of the role of the Governing Body. The importance of continued visibility and engagement was acknowledged. Members also welcomed investment in staff engagement activity, including team development initiatives.

ACTION: Employee Engagement Survey results to be circulated to Governing Body members.

The Governing Body was further advised that the Committee had accepted its proposed schedule of meetings for 2026/27, subject to minor amendments to accommodate member availability, and noted that the outstanding action listed had been implemented.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Cutting, seconded by Mrs McDowell, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and approval of the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

8.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 20 May 2026 Audit & Risk Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 08.03 Annual Review of the Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 08.04 User Account Management Policy
- Paper 08.05 Declaration and Handling of Criminal History Disclosures Policy
- Paper 08.06 Business Continuity Management Policy
- Paper 08.07 Conflict of Interest Policy
- Paper 08.08 Information Security Policy
- Paper 08.09 Risk Appetite Statement.

Reporting on the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 20 May 2026, the Committee Chair provided an overview of key matters considered, beginning with Internal Audit. Members noted that this was the first year with the College's new internal auditors and that five audits were completed, with all areas receiving "good" assurance with the exception of Sickness Absence, which was rated "satisfactory". It was noted that all recommendations have now been implemented, providing a high level of assurance across key business functions. Members noted the overall internal audit opinion confirming that the College has adequate and effective arrangements in place for governance, risk management and control, with no residual risks identified above risk appetite thresholds.

In relation to External Audit, the Governing Body noted that the Northern Ireland Audit Office Audit Strategy for the period to 31 March 2026 had been considered, with work now commencing to prepare accounts within a condensed audit timeframe.

An update was provided on the Corporate Risk Register, where members noted that there has been considerable movement over the past year, including the de-escalation of a number of risks and the identification of emerging areas, including HR and Payroll systems and financial implications associated with externally funded programmes.

Members further noted that a detailed review of the IT Services Risk Register had been undertaken, which provided assurance that strong controls are in place in a complex and evolving environment. Overall, the Committee confirmed that it is content that corporate risks are being managed appropriately by the Senior Leadership Team.

Members noted that the key strategic risks reflect the most significant risks to the College at this time, including financial stability, cyber security, student experience and recruitment and retention of staff.

The Committee also reviewed the Risk Appetite Statement Policy and recommended it for adoption by the Governing Body. A number of policies were also reviewed and recommended for approval, including the User Account Management Policy, Declaration and Handling of Criminal Justice History Disclosures (subject to amendment in 3.4), Business Continuity Management Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy and Information Security Policy.

The Governing Body was also advised that the proposed schedule of Audit & Risk Committee meetings for 2026/27 had been accepted.

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

9.0 CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 03 May 2026 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 CDP Update
- Paper 09.03 SWC Curriculum Plan 2025-28
- Paper 09.04 SWC Quality Improvement Plan 2024-27 Update
- Paper 09.05 FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy
- Paper 09.06 HE Attendance Policy
- Paper 09.07 HE Student Engagement Policy
- Paper 09.08 Learning Support Policy
- Paper 09.09 ESOL Policy.

Reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 3 June 2026, the Committee Chair advised that performance remains strong across key indicators, with continued improvements in student satisfaction and high levels of enrolment and retention.

Progress in delivery of the College Development Plan and the Three-Year Curriculum Plan (2025–2028) was highlighted, including continued development of provision in areas such as AI, Green Skills and Apprenticeships. Members noted the importance of partnership engagement and alignment to skills priorities, alongside emerging funding uncertainties across a number of programmes.

In relation to examinations, Ms McCartan advised that a small number of minor malpractice cases had arisen, relating to administrative errors. Members noted that these have been addressed with the awarding body, which is satisfied with the actions taken, and that there is no impact on student results.

The Committee recommended for approval the FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy, HE Attendance Policy, HE Student Engagement Policy and Learning Support Policy. Members also noted the ESOL Policy, which is a sector-driven policy issued by the Department for the Economy and implemented across all FE colleges, and confirmed the College's alignment with its requirements.

Members further noted the draft College Development Plan (CDP) for 2026/27 (09.02) submitted to DfE on 17 June 2026.

The Governing Body was further advised that the Committee had no outstanding actions, had agreed its schedule of meetings for 2026/27, and had confirmed that its business had been effectively discharged.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting, approval of the policies presented, noting of the ESOL Policy, and endorsement of the draft College Development Plan. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

10.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of 10 June 2026 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 Financial Management Report to 31 March 2026

Reporting on the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 10 June 2026, the Committee Chair highlighted the significant financial pressures facing the College in advance of confirmation of the 2026/27 budget.

Members noted the 2025/26 final outturn, including an underspend of approximately £400k. An update was also provided on financial operations, including trade debtors and creditors, with prompt payment performance noted at 90%, reflecting increased transaction volumes.

The Committee Chair advised that a number of externally funded projects present a level of risk going forward and that the capital allocation for 2026/27 has reduced to £450k, with a significant proportion expected to be required for critical IT infrastructure.

Members noted the continued uncertainty surrounding the 2026/27 budget position, including an estimated budget shortfall projected for the year, with approximately £1m of potential savings identified to date. In discussion, reference was made to the potential impact on Section 75 groups and rural communities, with confirmation that sector-level equality impact work is underway. Members also noted ongoing sector engagement with the Department, including requests to consider a range of planning scenarios.

ACTION: Chief Executive to consider correspondence to DfE to highlight the potential impact of the funding position, particularly in relation to rural provision and wider equality considerations.

The Governing Body was further advised that the Committee had accepted its proposed schedule of meetings for 2026/27 and that no outstanding actions remained.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Hackett, 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.

11.0 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2026/27

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Schedule of Meetings 2026/27

The proposed schedule of meetings for 2026/27 was considered.

AGREED: acceptance of the proposed schedule of meetings for 2026/27 subject to minor amendments to accommodate member availability at the February Staffing Committee.

12.0 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

It was noted that there were no outstanding actions.

13.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

14.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Members received an update on international activity, including a recent Study China programme which involved students participating in an 8-day visit to Beijing through partnership with the Chinese Consulate.

It was reported that a range of student mobility opportunities had been delivered during the year through the Turing Scheme, alongside College-supported activity, including a summer programme in Toronto.

Members noted that Turing funding will not be available for 2026/27 and that alternative options are being explored, with a continued focus on maintaining opportunities for students and potential future engagement with Erasmus funding.

Members noted that South West College had been awarded the Open College Network (OCN) NI Provider of the Year 2026.

15.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented favourably on the proceedings of the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.14 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 09 SEPTEMBER 2026

GB CHAIRPERSON



DATE 09 September 2026

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	24/06/2026	7.0	Employee Engagement Survey results to be circulated to Governing Body members.
2	24/06/2026	10	Chief Executive to consider correspondence to DfE to highlight the potential impact of the funding position, particularly in relation to rural provision and wider equality considerations.