

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 12 June 2024 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

PRESENT:

Mrs Libby Armstrong
Mr Michael Barnett
Mrs Maureen Brunt
Dr Frances Campbell
Mr Tom Corr
Mrs Maria Curran
Dr David Cutting
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Diarmuid Hanna
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood
Ms Alana Jones Campbell
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Ms Anne McCleary
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*from item 5.0*)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
Mr Sean O'Donnell, Head of Finance & Governance (*Item 6.0*)

APOLOGIES:

Mrs Deborah Brown
Mrs Gillian McDowell

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present and by congratulating Mr Tom Corr, Staff Governor and Lecturer in Science, and Ms Marie McGlone, Office Administrator, on their achievement in receiving Further Education (FE) Excellence Awards for lifetime contributions to FE.

Apologies were then tendered on behalf of Mrs Brown and Mrs McDowell.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY 11 APRIL 2024

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Thursday 11 April 2024.

Min Ref 4.0 – College Employers' Forum (CEF) – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of Belfast Metropolitan College's (BMC) withdrawal from CEF and of the revisions being

made to its constitution. He explained that the draft revised constitution has been forwarded to BMC for comment and that a response is awaited. He added that the five remaining members of CEF would welcome a return of BMC to its membership and informed the meeting of the recent resignation of BMC's Chief Executive and of the interim leadership arrangements in place.

Min Ref 11.0 – Externally Facilitated Review of Governing Body Effectiveness – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of the Partnership Agreement requirement for an externally facilitated review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body every three years. He explained that a sectoral procurement exercise will be undertaken to secure a facilitator for this review. He added that it is unlikely that all six reviews will be undertaken by December 2024 as requested by the Department for the Economy (DfE) and spoke of the recent reviews undertaken in relation to South West College.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Mr Ingram, 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

Lecturers' Pay Agreement – Dr O'Shiel confirmed trade unions' acceptance of the pay offer reported at the previous meeting and advised that work is underway to implement the payments in June 2024 payroll.

Reform to Save / Voluntary Severance Scheme – Dr O'Shiel reported the completion of the implementation of the Reform to Save / Voluntary Severance Scheme.

Review of Further Education Delivery Model – Dr O'Shiel noted the lack of communications regarding the Review of Further Education Delivery Model since the sectoral workshop held in February 2024 and commented on the significance of the Minister for the Economy's objective of regional balance since the restoration of the NI Executive and Assembly in February 2024.

2024/25 Budget – Dr O'Shiel commented on the satisfactory draft budget allocation for 2024/25 and referenced the presentation to be received by the Head of Finance & Governance later in the meeting.

Governing Body Committees – Dr O'Shiel thanked the chairs and members of all four committees for their work in conducting Governing Body business throughout the year and asked that continued focus is given to achieving DfE's objectives for the sector of increasing enrolments, reducing costs and enhancing quality. It was noted that a reserve fund for students would be welcomed but difficult to build in light of current financial governance arrangements.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

Student deaths – Ms McCartan informed the Governing Body of the sad news of the recent deaths of two students, Mr Matthew Brolly and Mr Oisín Gregg, and undertook to convey condolences to their families on behalf of the College.

2023/24 Review – Ms McCartan reflected on the 2023/24 year noting the recent student examination and assessment activity, the celebration events being held to mark student and staff achievements and the exit of staff under the Voluntary Severance Scheme, the decrease in enrolments in 2023/24 due to limited delivery of social inclusion and community based programmes, the success of the final of the SkillBuild NI competition hosted by the College, the student and staff mobilities taking place under

the Turing Scheme, and the reduction in reported student satisfaction levels and the consequent increased focus on the student experience in 2024/25.

2024/25 Planning – Ms McCartan reported on the forthcoming Connect & Plan days for support and curriculum staff focusing on Wellbeing at Work, plans to develop a coaching culture within the College and a forthcoming Management event to build on the leadership training delivered in 2023/24 and the recommendations of the ‘Next Chapter Report’ on the evaluation of the change programme.

New Initiatives – Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of the impending launch of the Youthscape Plus programme as well as developments in relation to potential projects in the areas of concrete decarbonation, green skills, rural innovation and a Manufacturing and Engineering industry based learning facility. Mrs Curran’s potential conflict of interest in relation to the Manufacturing and Engineering industry based learning facility in light of her employment with Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement (MEGA) was noted.

Budget 2024/25 – Ms McCartan informed the meeting of the £29.75m draft 2024/25 opening baseline budget allocation as well as of the £1m 2024/25 capital allocation and spoke of the negotiations to be held with DfE to finalise the budget.

Acknowledgements – Ms McCartan acknowledged the support of colleagues, the management team and governors throughout the 2023/24 year.

In response to questions and comments from members, Ms McCartan acknowledged the impact of the lecturers’ industrial action on student satisfaction rates, the importance of transparency in Governing Body reporting and the challenge in measuring the development of non-academic skills and undertook to circulate the evaluation of the Youthscape Programme.

Dr Quinn joined the meeting during the above item.

6.0 2024/25 BUDGET

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Draft 2024/25 Budget Allocation
- Paper 06.02 2024/25 Budget Overview.

Mr O’Donnell joined the meeting at this juncture.

With reference to the Draft 2024/25 Budget Allocation letter in paper 06.01, Mr O’Donnell reminded the Governing Body of the £5.3m budget gap projected for 2024/25 in late 2024 and commented on his satisfaction with the draft allocation, welcoming in particular the consolidation of allocations for pay and cost of living pressures into the baseline budget.

He then presented an overview of the College’s draft 2024/25 budget in paper 06.02, highlighting the projected increase in income and pay costs as well as the projected deficit of £2.8m and cash deficit of £850k, noting the work to be done to achieve a balanced budget.

It was noted that further analysis of the budget is required prior to its presentation to the Governing Body for approval including potential adjustments upon confirmation of 2024/25 enrolment figures. It was suggested that a special meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee may be called in September 2024 to consider the 2024/25 budget when further developed, and members were asked to grant approval to commit expenditure in the interim.

AGREED: authorisation to commit expenditure pending approval of the 2024/25 budget.

In the context of identifying potential measures to contribute to achieving a balanced budget, members commented on the impact of requesting a financial contribution for trips from students on their ability to participate.

Mr O'Donnell was thanked for his presentation and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

7.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 24 April 2024 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 Annual Review of Corporate Risk Register 2023/24
- Paper 07.03 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 07.04 Conflict of Interest Policy
- Paper 07.05 Information Governance Policy
- Paper 07.06 Minutes of 23 May Special Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.07 Information Security Policy
- Paper 07.08 Freedom to Speak Up – Raising a Concern Policy
- Paper 07.09 Response to DfE Risk Assessment of SWC
- Paper 07.10 2024/25 Annual Engagement Plan.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, explained that two meetings of the committee had been held in the reporting period and referenced the minutes thereof in papers 07.01 and 07.06.

He highlighted:

- the assurance received through the lowering of the residual risk scores of the risks on the Corporate Risk Register through mitigations;
- the satisfactory assurance ratings received on all internal audits undertaken in 2023/24 as well as the progress made in the implementation of audit recommendations;
- the ongoing cyber security threat mitigated by the College's achievement of the Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus accreditations;
- the Committee's acceptance of the strategy for the audit of the College's 2023/24 financial statements;
- the de-escalation by DfE of the risk posed by South West College from 'medium' to 'low/medium' and the expected impact of this on the level of proportionate autonomy afforded to the College;
- the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Conflict of Interest Policy, Information Governance Policy, Information Security Policy and Freedom to Speak Up – Raising a Concern Policy; and
- the high quality of information received by the Committee from management.

In response to questions and comments from governors, the College's continued focus on the student experience and on health and safety was noted and it was suggested that a deep dive into the risk associated with the quality of the student experience is

undertaken in 2024/25 and that committee chairs consider means of enhancing communication and interaction between committees on cross cutting themes.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Dr Cutting, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meetings 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 8 May 2024 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Fixed Term Contracts Policy
- Paper 08.03 Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy.

With reference to the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 8 May 2024, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, informed the meeting of the feedback received on the fourth 'We're Listening' Employee Engagement Survey, noting in particular the reported desire for heightened visibility of Governing Body members. She also drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Fixed Term Contracts Policy and the Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy and welcomed the development of the former in setting a framework for the management of fixed term contracts.

Ms McCartan commented on the reduction in the number of staff with fixed term contracts and on the budgetary instability leading to the increased use of fixed term contracts in previous years.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Ms McCleary, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendations 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 15 May 2024 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Financial Management Report to 31 March 2024
- Paper 09.03 Credit Control & Debt Management Policy
- Paper 09.04 Fees & Charges Policy 2024/25.

Reporting on the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 15 May 2024, Mr Barnett, Committee Chair, referenced the updated 2024/25 budget position presented to the Governing Body earlier in the meeting, informed members of the satisfactory financial outturn to 31 March 2024, noted the Committee's identification of Sustainability as one of its key strategic issues, and highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Credit Control & Debt Management Policy and the Fees & Charges Policy 2024/25.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Brunt, 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 29 May 2024 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 Careers Education, Advice and Guidance Policy
- Paper 10.03 Higher Education Tutorial Policy
- Paper 10.04 Higher Education Admissions, Admission Appeals and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy
- Paper 10.05 Higher Education Assessment Appeals Policy
- Paper 10.06 Higher Education Internal Moderation Policy
- Paper 10.07 Higher Education Submission of Coursework Policy.

Reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 29 May 2024, Dr Quinn, Committee Chair, informed the meeting of the concerns raised regarding non-attendance at exams, of the new Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) in development for September 2024 and September 2025 commencement, of the bid for increased Higher Education (HE) places for 2024/25 and of the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Careers Education, Advice and Guidance Policy, the Higher Education Tutorial Policy, the Higher Education Admissions, Admission Appeals and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy, the Higher Education Assessment Appeals Policy, the Higher Education Internal Moderation Policy and the Higher Education Submission of Coursework Policy. She also drew attention to the presentation received and discussion held on the review of Special Education Needs (SEN) provision, to the forthcoming establishment of a SEN Working Group and to the increased focus in 2024/25 on the quality of the student experience and the implementation of the Essential Skills action plan.

The meeting was also informed of the election of Mrs Isherwood as Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee for 2024/25 and 2025/26 and of the proposal to appoint Dr Quinn as HE Specialist Governor and Dr Cutting to the College's Artificial Intelligence Working Group.

In response to a query on the work simulation projects undertaken by a number of Advanced Technical Awards students, Ms McCartan outlined the difficulties encountered in securing sufficient and appropriate work placements for these students and of the alternative arrangements in place to simulate work experience through project based learning initiatives.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Quinn, seconded by Mrs Isherwood, adoption of the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting and the recommendations therein as well as the appointment of Dr Quinn as HE Specialist Governor and Dr Cutting to the College's Artificial Intelligence Working Group. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

11.0 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2024/25

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11 Schedule of Governing Body and Committee Meetings 2024/25.

AGREED: acceptance of the proposed Schedule of Governing Body and Committee Meetings 2024/25.

12.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

13.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Dr O'Shiel was commended for his effective and efficient chairing of the meeting.

Mr Corr and Mr Hanna withdrew from the meeting at this juncture. The meeting then went into confidential session.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

CHAIRPERSON 

DATE 11/09/2024

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	12/06/2024	5.0	Circulate evaluation of the Youthscape Programme.