

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 18 June 2025 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Erne Campus

PRESENT:	Mrs Libby Armstrong Mr Michael Barnett Mrs Maureen Brunt Dr Frances Campbell Mr Tom Corr Mrs Maria Hackett (<i>via MS Teams</i>) Mr Brian Ingram, Presiding Chair Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive Mrs Gillian McDowell (<i>from item 5.6 via MS Teams</i>) Dr Lynsey Quinn
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
APOLOGIES:	Dr David Cutting Mr Diarmuid Hanna Mrs Sandra Isherwood Ms Anne McCleary Dr Nichola Melanaphy Dr Nicholas O'Shiel

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Mr Ingram opened the meeting by welcoming all present and by advising that he would preside over the meeting at hand due to the unavailability of the Chair and Vice Chair of the Governing Body.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Dr Cutting, Mr Hanna, Mrs Isherwood, Ms McCleary, Dr Melanaphy and Dr O'Shiel and it was noted that Mrs McDowell would join the meeting in due course.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Dr Quinn declared her employment with the Open University.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 APRIL 2025

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Minutes of 2 April 2025 Governing Body Meeting.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

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

4.0 **CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 SWC Terms & Conditions 2025/26.

Governor Resignation – Mr Ingram informed the meeting of the recent resignation of Ms Alana Jones Campbell from the Governing Body. Members were then updated on the anticipated timeframe for a recruitment exercise by the Department for the Economy (DfE) to fill the vacancies in the Governing Body, on the inability to appoint a third co-optee to the Governing Body, and on the agreement in principle of Mr Patrick McKeown to sit on the College's Audit & Risk Committee for a further year subject to the approval of the Governing Body of North West Regional College.

ACTION: Dr O'Shiel to send a letter of thanks to Ms Jones Campbell in recognition of her contribution to the Governing Body.

Sectoral Collaboration – Ms McCartan reminded members of the function and recent history of the Colleges' Employers Forum (CEF) and advised that a revised constitution is under development to bring greater stability to the forum as well as clarity on its remit. She also reported on DfE's appointment of a Convener to strengthen the industrial relations framework.

AGREED: continuation of South West College's involvement in sectoral negotiating arrangements through its membership of the Colleges' Employers Forum subject to its satisfaction with the revised constitution.

16 – 18 Legislation – Members were invited to attend a forthcoming Department of Education led information session for the Further Education (FE) sector on the proposed 16 – 18 Legislation. In response to questions, Ms McCartan spoke of the impacts of duplicate provision in schools, provided an overview of the purpose and framework of the sectoral curriculum hubs and spoke of the need to ensure alignment with the seven sectors identified by DfE as key to the delivery of its economic vision.

Approvals Under Delegated Authority – Mr Ingram reported the Chair of the Governing Body's approval of the revised South West College Terms & Conditions as required for Open University institutional reapproval as well as his approval of the draft 2025/26 College Development Plan for submission to DfE.

Appointments to Working Groups – The meeting was apprised of the proposals to appoint Mrs Brunt to the College's Equality Working Group and Mr Ingram to the College's Working Group for the Autism NI Impact Award.

AGREED: appointment of Mrs Brunt to the College's Equality Working Group and Mr Ingram to the College's Working Group for the Autism NI Impact Award.

5.0 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

Reflecting on the 2024/25 academic year, Ms McCartan commented on the progress made and the challenges encountered. She identified the growth in student numbers, the increase in student success, strategic developments and cultural improvements as particular achievements and confirmed her satisfaction with the College's preparedness and capacity to meet the challenges anticipated in 2025/26 and beyond.

5.1 Student Numbers and Student Experience

Ms McCartan reported on latest student number and enrolment figures, highlighting the increase on 2023/24 figures and the exceeding of 2024/25 targets.

She thanked governors for their attendance at the Celebration of Success events held in the Dungannon, Erne and Omagh campuses and commented on the positive atmosphere felt at these events as well as on the encouraging feedback received from students and their families on the student experience.

5.2 Culture, Staff Engagement & Human Resources

Ms McCartan updated the meeting on the feedback received in the latest Employee Engagement Survey, noting the favourable trend in the views of and engagement from staff.

She advised of ongoing challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff and the resultant limitations on delivery.

She also reflected on the industrial relations difficulties experienced in year and spoke of the positive engagement with trade unions on workload and other matters following an agreement on lecturers pay for 2024/25 and 2025/26.

5.3 External Relations and Engagement

Ms McCartan referenced the success of the recent launch events held in relation to the Smart Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment (STRIDE) and Green Accelerator Skills (GRASP) projects.

She commented on the strengthening relationship with DfE as well as on the College's strong engagement with industry, noting the value of its participation in a number of industry advisory boards.

She also made the meeting aware of her role as Chair of the Principals' Group in 2025/26 and her membership of the Enhanced Investment Zones Professional Advisory Panel. In response to concerns raised regarding her workload, Ms McCartan spoke of her satisfaction to undertake these additional roles in the first instance.

5.4 Planning and Strategy

Ms McCartan referenced the 2025-28 Strategic Plan and 2025/26 College Development Plan in papers 06.01 and 06.02 to be considered forthwith.

5.5 Quality and Curriculum

Ms McCartan spoke of the ongoing self-evaluation and quality assurance processes undertaken to support Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) reviews.

She apprised the meeting of the concerns raised on essential skills achievement rates in a recent ETI review of Traineeships, explaining that an improvement plan has been developed in response, to include a pilot utilising an alternative teaching skill set, which will be closely monitored by the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee.

She also spoke of the opportunities and complexities arising from the Minister for the Economy's identification of colleges as destinations of choice for learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and undertook to circulate the relevant Ministerial Statement.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to circulate the Ministerial Statement on the Review of Post-School Education, Skills and Training Provision for Young People with Special Educational Needs.

Mrs McDowell joined the meeting at this juncture.

5.6 Finances

Whilst acknowledging the College's satisfactory 2025/26 budget position relative to the sector, Ms McCartan noted the difficult public sector financial climate and commented on the benefits of DfE's transition to multi-year budgeting.

She also advised of the work underway to develop the College's submission for DfE's apprenticeship re-contracting process.

5.7 Steady State Proposal

Ms McCartan reflected on the pressures and high pace of change experienced in recent years and advocated the introduction of a steady state approach in the forthcoming period to provide time to clarify purpose, consolidate provision and maintain focus on quality delivery. Commenting on the appropriateness of this proposal in light of recent changes and the current uncertain external environment, members supported the adoption of a steady state approach.

5.8 Governance and Committee Oversight

Ms McCartan spoke of her confidence in the effectiveness and synergy of the governance framework in considering strategic and operational matters and thanked governors for their support and governance throughout the year.

6.0 2025-2028 STRATEGIC PLAN

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 2025-2028 Strategic Plan
- Paper 06.02 Draft 2025/26 College Development Plan.

Ms McCartan drew attention to the priorities, objectives and actions within the 2025-28 Strategic Plan as well as to the targets detailed within the 2025/26 College Development Plan and confirmed that feedback received during the consultations undertaken in the development of the Strategic Plan had been incorporated into the version presented for adoption. An informational video outlining the four priorities within the Strategic Plan was then played and the Minister for the Economy's role in its approval was highlighted.

Members then welcomed the 2025-28 Strategic Plan and, in response to queries from members, Ms McCartan acknowledged the suggestion that Sustainability may be incorporated into future versions of college values and mooted her early thoughts on the focus of the 2025/26 Governing Body Strategy meeting in December 2025.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Armstrong, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the 2025-2028 Strategic Plan subject to Ministerial approval.

7.0 2025/26 BUDGET

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Revised 2025/26 Draft Budget Allocation
- Paper 07.02 Draft 2025/26 Budget Overview.

With reference to papers 07.01 and 07.02, Ms McCartan drew attention to the 2025/26 budget allocation of £34.968m from DfE and to the cash deficit in the College's draft internal budget. She reminded the meeting of the financial objective of achieving a

balanced budget, listed potential sources of funding to close the gap, advised that the 2025/26 budget is unlikely to be finalised until later in the year when further clarifications are received and sought authorisation to commit expenditure in the interim. She also advised of the anticipated change in legislation to align colleges' statutory year with that of DfE and commented on the benefits and drawbacks of this approach.

AGREED: authorisation to commit expenditure pending approval of the 2025/26 budget.

8.0 PROJECTS OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 1 May 2025 Projects Oversight Committee Meeting.

Reporting on the inaugural meeting of the Projects Oversight Committee held on 1 May 2025, Dr Campbell, Committee Chair, explained that the Terms of Reference for the Committee had been discussed, that a detailed presentation had been received on the College's four PeacePlus funded projects and that project risk registers will be developed and reviewed by both the Projects Oversight Committee and the Audit & Risk Committee.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell, seconded by Mr Corr, adoption of the minutes of the Projects Oversight Committee meeting. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Presiding Chair.

9.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 7 May 2025 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Employee Standards & Ethical Practice Policy
- Paper 09.03 Student Internship Policy
- Paper 09.04 Equal Opportunities, Good Relations & Cultural Diversity Policy.

With reference to paper 09.01, Mrs McDowell, Presiding Chair of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 7 May 2025, highlighted the update received on 2024/25 and 2025/26 lecturer pay negotiations, the increase in days lost due to sickness, the progress reported on the investigations and maintenance in the training and preparatory kitchens in the Erne Campus and associated staffing matters, and the results of recent employee pulse and engagement surveys, noting the feedback received in relation to awareness of the Governing Body. She also drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Employee Standards & Ethical Practice Policy, the Student Internship Policy and the Equal Opportunities, Good Relations & Cultural Diversity Policy.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell, seconded by Dr Campbell, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendations within. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Presiding Chair.

10.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of 14 May 2025 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 Corporate Risk Register

- Paper 10.03 Annual Review of the Corporate Risk Register 2024 – 2025
- Paper 10.04 Web Management Policy
- Paper 10.05 Data Protection Policy
- Paper 10.06 Access to Information Policy
- Paper 10.07 Conflict of Interest Policy
- Paper 10.08 Special Category Appropriate Policy Document
- Paper 10.09 Risk Management Policy
- Paper 10.10 Risk Appetite Statement.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 14 May 2025 by highlighting the 'satisfactory' assurance received following internal audits of Budgetary Management & Financial Control and Recruitment & Selection Processes as well as the positive outcome from the advisory internal audit of the GDPR framework.

He went on to confirm the Committee's acceptance of the NIAO's Strategy for the Audit of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements; note the Committee's review of the Corporate Risk Register (CRR) and the in-year de-escalation of four risks for monitoring at management level; comment on the Committee's satisfaction with the management of risk; and draw attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Web Management Policy, Data Protection Policy, Access to Information Policy, Conflict of Interest Policy, Special Category Appropriate Policy Document, Risk Management Policy and Risk Appetite Statement. He also thanked the Senior Leadership Team and all involved in supporting the Committee for their work during the 2024/25 year.

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

11.0 CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Minutes of 28 May 2025 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 11.02 Policy for Students with Caring Responsibilities.

In relation to the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 28 May 2025, Dr Quinn, in the absence of the Committee Chair, provided an overview of the discussion held on the proposal to extend current Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision to meet increased demand whilst delivering departmental objectives and reported on the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Policy for Students with Caring Responsibilities.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Quinn, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting and the recommendation therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Presiding Chair.

12.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12.01 Minutes of 4 June 2025 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting

- Paper 12.02 Financial Management Report to 30 April 2025.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 4 June 2025 by referencing the update received on the 2025/26 budget, the discussion held on budget stability and the marginal 0.02% overspend recorded in the financial year to 31 March 2025.

He then apprised the meeting of the update received on the investigations and maintenance work carried out in the training and preparatory kitchens in the Erne campus including the assessment undertaken by the Health & Safety Executive and potential legal proceedings in relation to reimbursement for latent defects. Members were also advised of the progress of each of the four strands in the related action plan.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Presiding Chair.

13.0 ELECTION OF CHAIR OF THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE

The Secretary to the Governing Body invited nominations for the position of Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee for the 2025/26 and 2026/27 period.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Corr, seconded by Mrs Armstrong, appointment of Mr Ingram as Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee for 2025/26 and 2026/27.

14.0 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2025/26

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 14.01 Schedule of Governing Body and Committee Meetings 2025/26.

Mrs McCauley undertook to secure an alternative date for the Governing Body Strategy Meeting in December 2025 due to a clash with the Higher Education Graduation ceremony.

AGREED: acceptance of the proposed Schedule of Governing Body and Committee Meetings 2025/26 with the amendment noted above.

15.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 15.01 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that all actions had been implemented.

16.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

It was noted that a meal had been provided for governors immediately prior to the meeting in hand.

17.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

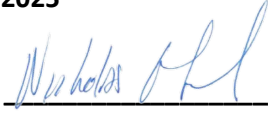
18.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented on the effectiveness of the meeting.

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

**CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
10 SEPTEMBER 2025**

CHAIRPERSON



DATE 10/09/2025

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	18/06/2025	4.0	Dr O'Shiel to send a letter of thanks to Ms Jones Campbell in recognition of her contribution to the Governing Body.
2	18/06/2025	5.5	Ms McCartan to circulate the Ministerial Statement on the Review of Post-School Education, Skills and Training Provision for Young People with Special Educational Needs.