

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 20 November 2024 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Erne Campus

PRESENT:

Mrs Libby Armstrong
Mr Michael Barnett (*via MS Teams*)
Dr Frances Campbell (*via MS Teams*)
Mrs Maria Curran
Dr David Cutting (*via MS Teams*)
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood (*via MS Teams*)
Ms Alana Jones Campbell
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Ms Anne McCleary
Mrs Gillian McDowell (*via MS Teams*)
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams*)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mr Ciaran McManus, Director of Development & Support (*Item 6.0*)
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer

APOLOGIES:

Mrs Maureen Brunt
Mr Diarmuid Hanna

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present including those joining virtually via MS Teams.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mrs Brunt and Mr Hanna.

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 WEDNESDAY 11 SEPTEMBER 2024

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 11 September 2024.

Min Ref 7.0 – 2024/25 College Development Plan – Dr O'Shiel reported his approval of the 2024/25 College Development Plan (CDP) on behalf of the Governing Body following a CDP finalisation meeting with the Department for the Economy (DfE) and referenced the final CDP in paper 10.02a.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Curran and seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, 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 ICS Proposal for Evaluation of GB Effectiveness.

Appointment of Governors – Dr O'Shiel reported the re-appointment of Mr Diarmuid Hanna as Student Governor and the pending appointment of Dr Nichola Melanaphy as Support Staff Governor.

Review of Governing Body Effectiveness – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of the requirement under paragraph 19.3 of the Partnership Agreement for a triennial externally facilitated review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body. He explained that a sectoral exercise had sourced the Department of Finance's (DoF) Innovation & Consultancy Services (ICS) to undertake the reviews in all six colleges and referenced the proposal in paper 04. In response to questions from members, Ms McCartan confirmed the budget availability for the review in the 2024/25 year and Dr O'Shiel confirmed DfE's satisfaction with the procurement process undertaken and drew attention to the proposed approach outlined in page 9 of paper 04.

AGREED: Approval to engage ICS to undertake an externally facilitated review of the Governing Body's effectiveness as set out in paper 04.

Review of Further Education Sector Collaborative Working – Dr O'Shiel informed the meeting that a report on Ernst & Young's review of Further Education (FE) sector collaborative working has been submitted to DfE and that it is expected that this report will be shared with college chairs and principals in due course.

Review of the FE Delivery Model – Dr O'Shiel explained that the future of the FE delivery model will be influenced by the outcome of the review of FE sector collaborative working.

Higher Education Graduations – Dr O'Shiel extended an invitation to governors to attend the Higher Education (HE) graduation ceremonies taking place in early December 2024.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Final 2023/24 CDP Progress Report.

Performance – Ms McCartan reported increases in student numbers, enrolments and Full-Time Equivalent students compared with 2023/24 statistics as well as a 3% increase in the overall success rate in 2023/24 compared with the 2022/23 figure including an increase in the Essential Skills success rate. She paid tribute to the Director of Curriculum and academic departments for the positive performance evidenced.

Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) – Ms McCartan reported on the positive feedback received following an ETI inspection of the Step Up Programme. She noted the utilisation of the new inspection framework during this exercise and advised of a forthcoming inspection of Traineeships as well as of the ETI's District Inspector's presentation to staff at the recent Curriculum Conference.

WorldSkills – Ms McCartan spoke of the achievements of college students at the SkillBuild and WorldSkills competitions.

Governing Body Strategy Meeting – With reference to the forthcoming Governing Body (GB) Strategy Meeting, Ms McCartan reflected on the College’s current strategic framework incorporating its Mission, Vision & Values, the College Development Plan and the associated budget, and spoke of the objective of identifying strategic priorities to set the direction of the College in the medium term.

Organisational Development – Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of the establishment of a Culture & Engagement Team and of the initial work undertaken by this team.

Communications – Ms McCartan reported on the redevelopment of the Staff Hub and on the revised approach to staff communications following feedback received through staff surveys.

External Engagements – Ms McCartan reported on engagements held with political representatives, Invest Northern Ireland, Queens University Belfast and the Mid South West Growth Deal as well as on a forthcoming meeting with the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce.

Industrial Relations – Ms McCartan advised that a business case for payment of the 2024/25 support staff contractual pay remit has been accepted by DfE and that a 2024/25 pay request has been received in respect of academic staff.

Financial Stability – Ms McCartan explained that internal budget virements may be made following a mid-term review of internal cost centre expenditure. Dr O’Shiel commented on the College’s low cost base relative to the sector and on the aim to maintain financial efficiency. Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of DfE’s request for a further increase in 2024/25 target student numbers and of the rejection of this request in the absence of supporting resource in light of the College’s positive efficiency indicators.

6.0 EXTERNALLY FUNDED PROJECTS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Externally Funded Projects.

Mr McManus joined the meeting at this juncture.

Mr McManus commenced his presentation by highlighting the College’s central role in leading and delivering on skills and social development projects in collaboration with a range of partners and outlining the benefits of externally funded projects to the College and its students.

He went on to provide an overview of the current and recently awarded externally funded projects including the STRIDE (Smart Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment), GRASP (Green Accelerator Skills Project) and Youthscape+ projects funded by PeacePlus.

In response to questions and comments, the meeting was apprised of the internal skills available to resource the new projects, of the potential resourcing challenges in the areas of ICT and green skills, and of the need to consider the governance framework in relation to externally funded projects in light of their increased number, scope and complexity including management of risk.

Dr O'Shiel thanked Mr McManus for his presentation and asked him to extend the appreciation of the Governing Body to all involved in the sourcing and delivery of externally funded projects.

Mr McManus 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 25 September '24 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 Bribery Act Policy
- Paper 07.03 Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference
- Paper 07.04 Minutes of 13 November 2024 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.05 2024/25 Mid-Year Assurance Statement
- Paper 07.06 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 07.07 Electronic Communications Policy
- Paper 07.08 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Paper 07.09 2023/24 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, explained that two committee meetings had been held since the last Governing Body meeting.

In relation to the 25 September 2024 Audit & Risk Committee meeting, he reported on the Committee's receipt of the 2023/24 Internal Audit Assurance Report, highlighting the 'satisfactory' assurance awarded; noted the 'good' progress awarded in relation to the implementation of internal audit recommendations; listed the audits scheduled under the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan; commented on the Committee's comprehensive review of the Corporate Risk Register; and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Bribery Act Policy and the Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

In relation to the 13 November 2024 committee meeting, Mr Ingram explained that the 2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance and 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements were not available for the Committee's review as expected due to the late identification of a number of sectoral issues requiring adjustments. He noted the early indications of an unqualified audit opinion subject to resolution of the sectoral matters with no uncorrected misstatements or irregular expenditure identified. He added that a special meeting will be arranged to facilitate the Committee's review of the 2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance and 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements in due course.

Mr Ingram also commented on the assurance received by the Committee through the scrutiny of the Corporate Risk Register and the risk framework generally; noted that no fraud had been identified in the reporting period; highlighted the 2023/24 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report for the attention of the Governing Body and the Accounting Officer; and referenced the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Electronic Communications Policy and the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, 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 2 October 2024 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Workforce Development Policy
- Paper 08.03 Equality Progress Report
- Paper 08.04 The Next Chapter Action Plan
- Paper 08.05 Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

With reference to the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 2 October 2024, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, informed the Governing Body of the progress made in the implementation of the Next Chapter Action Plan; commented on the challenge in ensuring compliance with completion of corporate training modules; reported a reduction in the sickness absence rate in 2023/24 compared with both the 2022/23 figure and the sector average; and confirmed the submission of the 2023/24 Equality Progress Report noting the extensive activity evidenced in the report. She also highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Workforce Development Policy and the Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Mr Ingram, 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 16 October 2024 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Net Zero Action Plan
- Paper 09.03 Sustainability Action Plan
- Paper 09.04 Financial Management Report 2023/24
- Paper 09.05 Financial Scheme of Delegation Policy & Procedure
- Paper 09.06 Procurement Policy
- 09.07 Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 16 October 2024 by welcoming the balanced budget position at the commencement of the year.

He went on to comment on the updates received on the Committee's Key Strategic Issues, highlight the work done in the development of a Net Zero Action Plan and a Sustainability Action Plan, and inform the meeting of the challenges encountered in the management of the PFI contracts. He also highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Net Zero Action Plan, the Sustainability Action Plan, the Financial Scheme of Delegation Policy & Procedure, the Procurement Policy and the Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference.

Ms McCartan referenced the Carbon Literacy training undertaken by a number of governors and informed the meeting of the College's nomination as a finalist in the 2024/25 Beacon Awards in the Education in Sustainable Development category.

Members commended the Sustainability Officer for the delivery of the Carbon Literacy training programme and the development of the Net Zero and Sustainability Action

Plans and suggested that additional detail is provided within in relation to timeframe and cost.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Curran, 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 23 October 2024 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02a 2024/25 College Development Plan
- Paper 10.02b 2024/25 Educational Report Card
- Paper 10.03 WorldSkills Internal Funding Proposal
- Paper 10.04 Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Paper 10.05 Anti Bullying Policy for Students
- Paper 10.06 Examinations Conflict of Interest Policy
- Paper 10.07 Learner Experience & Work Placement Policy
- Paper 10.08 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy
- Paper 10.09 Examinations Malpractice Policy
- Paper 10.10 Examinations Word Processing Policy
- Paper 10.11 Student Attendance Policy
- Paper 10.12 Student Charter
- Paper 10.13 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference.

Reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 23 October 2024, Mrs Isherwood, Committee Chair, began by providing an overview of the updates received in relation to the Committee's key strategic issues noting the focus on the student experience, the need for a review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) policy and practices in light of an increasing prevalence of students presenting with SEN, the potential impact of the UK government's review of proposed T Levels and the increase in the overall Essential Skills success rate.

She went on to reference the Management Report received by the Committee and highlight the satisfaction with 2023/24 enrolment performance, the development of strategic partnerships through the delivery of externally funded projects and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the policies listed in papers 10.04 to 10.12 as well as its recommendations for approval of the WorldSkills internal funding proposal and the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference.

Management commented on the notable increase in the prevalence of medical, mental health, safeguarding, behavioural and discipline issues amongst students and re-affirmed the commitment to enhancing the student experience. Members spoke of the value of the WorldSkills internal funding proposal in enhancing the student experience and commended staff on the improvement in student success rates, particularly in relation to Essential Skills.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Dr Cutting, 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 2023/24 GOVERNING BODY SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Cover Letter to 2023/24 Governing Body Self-Assessment Exercise Analysis Report
- Paper 11.02 2023/24 Governing Body Self-Assessment Exercise Analysis Report.

Drawing attention to the 2023/24 Governing Body Self-Assessment Exercise Analysis Report, Dr O'Shiel noted the improvement in the perception reported by governors in all five themes assessed compared with the 2022/23 results and welcomed feedback from members at any time on any aspect of the Governing Body's operations.

12.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

13.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Ms McCartan informed the meeting of health and safety concerns in the training kitchen in the Erne Campus and of the related investigations undertaken to date, advising that further updates will be provided to relevant committees in due course.

Dr O'Shiel drew the non-confidential section of the meeting to a close and explained that a confidential section would follow. He added that all business is covered in non-confidential session where possible and that business is covered in confidential session only in cases where a genuine need for confidentiality arises.

14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented on the effectiveness of the meeting.

The meeting then went into confidential session.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2025

CHAIRPERSON



DATE

05/02/2025