

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a strategy meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 9:30 am
in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

PRESENT:

Mr Michael Barnett
Mrs Maureen Brunt (*from item 3.0*)
Dr Frances Campbell
Mr Tom Corr
Mrs Maria Curran
Dr David Cutting
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Diarmuid Hanna (*from item 4.0*)
Ms Alana Jones Campbell
Mr Brian Ingram
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Ms Anne McCleary (*from item 3.0*)
Mrs Gillian McDowell
Dr Nichola Melanaphy
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chairman
Dr Lynsey Quinn

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Moira Doherty, DfE
Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mrs Sharon McGrath, Director of Corporate Services
Mr Ciaran McManus, Director of Development & Support
Mr Pdraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
Ms Louise Watson, DfE

APOLOGIES: Mrs Sandra Isherwood

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to Dr Melanaphy, recently appointed staff governor, on her first attendance at a Governing Body meeting, and to Ms Doherty and Ms Watson, Department for the Economy (DfE).

He reflected on the progress made in relation to prior years' focus on the change management process and DfE's objectives for the Further Education (FE) Sector of increasing enrolments, reducing costs and enhancing quality, and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to inform the development of a longer term strategy for the College in alignment with the Departmental Economic Vision of Good Jobs, Regional Balance, Raised Productivity and Reduced Carbon Emissions.

An apology was tendered on behalf of Mrs Isherwood.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 OVERVIEW OF COLLEGE POSITION

PRESENTED at the meeting and subsequently made available to all members:

- Paper 03 GB Strategy Meeting Presentation.

Ms McCartan began her overview of the College's current position by reflecting on the College's current strategic framework incorporating its Mission, Vision & Values, the College Development Plan and the associated budget. She spoke of the objective of identifying strategic priorities to set the direction of the College in the medium term.

With the aid of the PowerPoint presentation in Paper 03, she then provided an overview of the College's current position in terms of its profile and performance, the economic and social challenges impacting skills development in the region, the opportunities presented through collaboration with partners and the alignment of college activity with government priorities.

Ms McCleary and Mrs Brunt joined the meeting during the above presentation.

4.0 DFE STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FE SECTOR

Ms Doherty commented on the assurance provided by Ms McCartan's overview of the College's current position and went on to highlight the clear roadmap provided for the sector through the four pillars set out in the Department's Economic Vision.

She spoke of the importance of collaboration at all levels and of the opportunities provided through the College's cross-border location in terms of North-South collaboration. She provided an update on the status of the Review of the FE Delivery Model noting the need for agreement on future collaborative working arrangements in relation to staff terms and conditions before progress on the delivery model may be made. She also advised of the establishment of a working group to consider post-19 special educational needs (SEN) provision in light of the marked increase in children with SEN and the associated increased demand on college provision for this cohort.

With reference to the Departmental Economic Vision and the associated action plan, Ms Watson provided an overview of the four pillars of Good Jobs, Regional Balance, Raised Productivity and Reduced Carbon Emissions and outlined the FE Sector's role in contributing to the achievement of these objectives.

The following points were raised during the subsequent discussion:

- The importance of collaboration with other colleges, DfE, industry, local councils and other partners and stakeholders;
- The challenges facing the sector in respect of industrial relations and staff recruitment and retention;
- The need for engagement with the Department for Communities (DfC) in relation to overcoming barriers to education and training including access to the Hardship Fund;
- The opportunities afforded through the current political support for FE;
- The potential outworkings of the Independent Review of Education in NI;
- The engagement between DfE and the Department of Education (DE) on the 14-19 agenda and post 16 pathways; and
- The plans to move to a three-year budgeting model.

On conclusion of the discussion, Dr O'Shiel thanked Ms Doherty and Ms Watson for their address to the Governing Body and identified the following as the three main areas emerging for close monitoring:

- DfE and DE collaboration on the 14 – 19 agenda;
- DfE and DfC collaboration on overcoming barriers to education and training; and
- The introduction of a three-year budgeting model.

Mr Hanna joined the meeting during the above presentation.

A short break then followed during which Ms Doherty and Ms Watson withdrew from the meeting.

5.0 DEVELOPMENT OF A THREE-YEAR STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation Ms McCartan introduced the proposed priorities for the forthcoming period as:

- The Learner Experience;
- Partnerships;
- Sustainability; and
- Governance & Culture.

The Governing Body, accompanied by the Chief Executive and Directors, then subdivided into groups to discuss the proposed priorities including their appropriateness and definition, the actions required to address the associated issues and the key milestones for monitoring progress.

Feedback on the discussions was then shared, following which it was agreed to endorse the development of a Three-Year Strategic Framework based on the four priorities of the Learner Experience, Partnerships, Sustainability and Governance & Culture. It was anticipated that the framework would be considered for approval by the Governing Body at its June 2025 meeting with biannual progress reports to be received by the Governing Body from 2025/26.

AGREED: endorsement of the development of a Three-Year Strategic Framework based on the four priorities of the Learner Experience, Partnerships, Sustainability and Governance & Culture.

Ms McCartan then provided the meeting with details of three potential projects for development in 2025 in the areas of Special Educational Needs, Decarbonisation within the Concrete Industry, and Sustainability within the Green Technology, Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering Industries. The Governing Body endorsed the continuation of developmental work to explore the potential of these projects.

AGREED: endorsement of the development of the three potential projects set out above.

6.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, reminded the Governing Body of the delay in the finalisation of the 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements due to the late identification of a number of sectoral issues requiring adjustments and of the plan to convene a special meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee to review the

2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance and 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements. In light of time constraints, it was then agreed to delegate authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, to consider any recommendation made by the Audit & Risk Committee in relation to the 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements on behalf of the Governing Body.

AGREED: to delegate authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Chief Executive, as Accounting Officer, to consider any recommendation made by the Audit & Risk Committee in relation to the 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements on behalf of the Governing Body.

7.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Dr O'Shiel commented on the alignment of the agreed college strategic priorities with the four pillars set out in the Departmental Economic Vision. He then extended his thanks to all members for their input into the meeting and to those college staff present for their role in organising the event.

The meeting concluded at 12:45 pm.

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

CHAIRMAN 

DATE 05/02/2025