SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body** of **South West College**
held on **Wednesday 09 September 2026** at 5:30 pm in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus

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PRESENT:	Mr Michael Barnett Mrs Maureen Brunt Dr Frances Campbell Mrs Maria Hackett Mr Brian Ingram *(joined at Item 4.0) (via MS Teams)* Mrs Sandra Isherwood *(via MS Teams)* Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive *(via MS Teams)* Mr Padraig McNamee, Deputy Principal & Chief Executive Mrs Gillian McDowell Dr Nichola Melanaphy *(via MS Teams)* Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair Dr Lynsey Quinn
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
APOLOGIES:	Mrs Libby Armstrong Mr Tom Corr Mr David Cutting Ms Anne McCleary

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present to the first Governing Body meeting of the 2026/27 year.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mrs Armstrong, Mr Corr, Mr Cutting and Ms McCleary.

The Chair, on behalf of the Governing Body, extended sincere condolences to the families, friends and colleagues of College staff members Mr Ricky Lennox and Mr Aiden McGrath following their recent passing. The Chair also conveyed condolences to Mr Corr and his family on the recent death of his father.

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 24 June 2026.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Brunt and seconded by Mr Barnett, that the above minutes are accepted as a true and accurate record. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

4.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Strategic Plan Review
- Paper 05.02 Draft 2026/27 College Development Plan
- Paper 05.03 260624 – NIA – Regional Balance Bill – Call for Evidence
  260720 – SWC Draft Response to the NIA Regional Balance Bill.

Strategic Plan

With the aid of a presentation, Ms McCartan provided an overview of progress against the Strategic Plan 2025-2029 during its first year of implementation and outlined the proposed priorities for Year Two.

Members noted the strong progress achieved across the four strategic priorities and endorsed the continued focus on learner experience, partnerships and collaboration, sustainability, governance and culture.

Members noted the proposed next steps for the Strategic Plan during 2026/27, including development of the College Operational Plans, alignment with the College Development Plan and continued monitoring of delivery and outcomes.

Ms McCartan confirmed that the commitment to Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWAG) sits within the Governance and Culture priority and will be more explicitly referenced.

AGREED: Members endorsed the proposed Year Two Strategic Plan priorities and areas of focus for 2026/27 and approved the proposed next steps for implementation and delivery.

Mr Ingram joined the meeting at this juncture.

Members noted that this would be Mrs McDowell's final Governing Body meeting and recorded their appreciation for her contribution to the work of the Governing Body and its Committees over the past eight years.

Student Update

Mr McNamee provided a high-level update on student recruitment and enrolment activity for 2026/27. Members noted that enrolments continued to progress positively and that final figures for 2025/26 had exceeded those achieved in 2024/25. Mr McNamee advised that, notwithstanding current funding challenges, the College remains focused on building strong foundations for future growth, with particular emphasis on lifelong learning, employer engagement and skills development.

Members discussed the impact of current funding arrangements on enrolment activity and noted that recruitment continues to be supported through a combination of Department-funded provision and externally funded programmes. Members also highlighted the challenges facing apprenticeship recruitment arising from increased employment costs for employers.

Discussion also focused on the support available to students in securing employer placements, with members noting the College's strong employer links and commitment to assisting students where required. Members further welcomed the range of initiatives available to support engagement between prospective students

and employers, including the use of the College's employer portal.

Quality Improvement
Mr McNamee provided an update on quality improvement activity, including ongoing work in relation to Traineeships and Essential Skills. Members noted the early indications from performance monitoring and welcomed the continued focus on retention, achievement and student success.

Mr McNamee advised that work is underway to strengthen performance monitoring arrangements through more frequent review periods, enabling earlier identification of issues and more timely interventions. Members noted that a number of processes are already in place and that these will continue to be developed and refined.

Members suggested that further analysis of performance data may help identify underlying trends and root causes and noted the potential value of engaging with the Department for the Economy regarding any sectoral analysis or support that may be available.

College Development Plan
Ms McCartan presented the draft College Development Plan for 2026/27 and outlined the key delivery priorities for the year ahead. Members noted the challenging financial environment within which the Plan had been developed and recognised the importance of maintaining quality provision while responding to resource constraints.

AGREED: Members approved the draft College Development Plan for 2026/27 subject to any amendments arising from discussion and further engagement with DfE.

Regional Balance Bill
Members then considered the Committee for the Economy's Call for Evidence on the Regional Balance Bill together with the proposed South West College response which reflects the College's perspective.

In discussion, members welcomed the emphasis placed on rurality, regional access, skills, higher education pathways and SME support and recognised the important role of Further Education Colleges in supporting regional development.

AGREED: Members endorsed the College's draft response to the Regional Balance Bill Call for Evidence.

5.0 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 FE Fit for the Future Update
- Paper 04.02 260812 DfE Annual Performance Assessment Process 2025/26 – Individual Governor Assessments.

Dr O'Shiel referred to the recent update from DfE regarding the FE Fit for the Future programme and noted the establishment of programme governance structures, including sector working groups on which the six FE colleges will be represented.

Members emphasised the importance of ensuring South West College is represented at all levels of the programme to provide a strong voice on matters relating to rurality,

regional balance and the needs of learners and employers across the South West region.

The Governing Body endorsed continued active engagement in the programme and agreed that management should work with Dr Campbell to ensure the College's views are effectively represented within the emerging structures. Members recognised the strategic significance of the reform programme and the importance of continued engagement between the Department and the FE sector in shaping reforms that are practical, sustainable and responsive to the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy.

AGREED: that members endorsed the College's continued active engagement in the FE Fit for the Future programme and supported efforts to secure appropriate representation across the programme's governance and working group structures to ensure that the interests of the South West region, its learners and employers are effectively represented.

Members noted correspondence from the Department regarding the annual performance assessment process for Governors and the requirement for assessments to be completed and returned by 12 October 2026.

The Chair congratulated Mrs Brunt, Mr Ingram and Dr Campbell on their reappointment to the Governing Body and welcomed their continued contribution to the work of the College and its committees.

Dr O'Shiel updated members on Governing Body membership, including ongoing engagement with DfE regarding the appointment of a new Chair.

Ms McCartan also highlighted the current membership of Governing Body Committees and invited members to consider whether they would wish to join the Audit and Risk Committee in particular. It was noted that this would be kept under review as part of ongoing governance planning and succession arrangements.

Members noted that an Accountability Meeting with the Chair and DfE Minister is scheduled for 19 October 2026.

6.0 BUDGET 2026/27 UPDATE

Ms McCartan provided an update on the 2026/27 budget position.

Members noted that there had been no significant change since the previous meeting and that engagement with DfE remained ongoing.

Ms McCartan advised that the College continues to monitor the position closely and to plan prudently within a challenging and uncertain financial environment. While work continues to identify efficiencies and opportunities to maximise income, the College remains focused on protecting the learner experience and maintaining delivery of priority provision.

7.0 POLICY REVIEW

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Standing Orders

- Paper 07.02 Partnership Agreement including Engagement Plan.

Ms McCartan advised that the Governing Body Standing Orders had been reviewed and remained appropriate.

Members noted the Partnership Agreement between the College and the Department for the Economy, together with the Engagement Plan for 2026/27.

Ms McCartan advised that the Engagement Plan provides a structured framework for collaboration and communication between the College and the Department. It had been substantially reviewed and refreshed and now focuses on the key strategic and accountability engagements planned during the year.

Members noted that the arrangements support open, transparent and constructive engagement between the College and its sponsoring Department.

AGREED: that the Standing Orders, Partnership Agreement and Engagement Plan be noted.

8.0 GOVERNANCE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Review of 2025/26 Governance Key Performance Indicators
- Paper 08.02 GB demonstration of College Values
- Paper 08.03 Proposed 2026/27 Governance Key Performance Indicators.

Members noted the review of performance against the 2025/26 Governance Key Performance Indicators and agreed that all indicators had been achieved during the year.

Members also noted the paper setting out how the Governing Body demonstrates the College Values through its activities and behaviours.

The proposed Governance Key Performance Indicators for 2026/27 were then considered.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Brunt and seconded by Dr Campbell, adoption of the proposed 2026/27 Governance Key Performance Indicators.

9.0 REGISTER OF INTERESTS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Register of Governors' Interests.

Mrs Nugent presented the Register of Governors' Interests for 2026/27 and requested timely notification of any changes during the year.

10.0 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

It was noted that there were no outstanding actions.

11.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Members noted that a Foundation Degree student had been named NI Travel Student of the Year at the 34th Northern Ireland Travel & Tourism Awards and that a member of lecturing staff had been shortlisted in a category at the forthcoming Institute of Hospitality Northern Ireland Awards.

13.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented favourably on the proceedings of the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.48 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 04 NOVEMBER 2026

GB CHAIRPERSON _____ DATE _____