

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Thursday 11 April 2024 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Erne Campus

PRESENT:	Mrs Libby Armstrong Mr Michael Barnett Mrs Maureen Brunt (<i>items 1.0 – 5.0</i>) Dr Frances Campbell Mr Tom Corr Mrs Maria Curran Dr David Cutting Mr Diarmuid Hanna Mr Brian Ingram Mrs Sandra Isherwood Ms Alana Jones Campbell Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive Ms Anne McCleary (<i>via MS Teams</i>) Mrs Gillian McDowell Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair Dr Lynsey Quinn
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body Mr Padraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum (<i>Items 1.0 - 6.0</i>) Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
APOLOGIES:	Mrs Deborah Brown Mrs Maria Hackett

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by acknowledging the success of the Princess Royal's visit to the College earlier in the day, commending Ms McCartan and all staff involved in making arrangements for this showcase event and thanking members for facilitating a change to the date of the meeting. Ms McCartan commented on the input of staff into the event as well as on the networking opportunity afforded by it and the good engagement evidenced amongst students, staff and visitors.

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

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Dr Quinn acknowledged the references to her employer, the Open University, within a number of the papers for the meeting.

At later stages in the meeting Ms Jones Campbell declared her former membership of the Board of the Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service and Dr Cutting declared his membership of the University & College Union.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 31 January 2024.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Dr Cutting, 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 Wider Operating Context.

College Employers' Forum (CEF) – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of Belfast Metropolitan College's (BMC) withdrawal from CEF and reported on the legal advice received confirming the validity of its continuation in this circumstance. He explained that CEF's constitution is under review to clarify roles and responsibilities, leaving it open for BMC to rejoin at any time.

Governors then confirmed their satisfaction for South West College (SWC) to continue its membership of CEF to work collectively on the sectoral industrial relations framework and granted delegated authority to the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Governing Body to approve the revised CEF constitution.

AGREED: to continue SWC's membership of CEF.

AGREED: to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Governing Body to approve the revised CEF constitution.

Review of Further Education Delivery Model – Dr O'Shiel reported on the meeting held in February 2024 with college Chairs and Chief Executives along with DfE officials on the Review of the Further Education (FE) Delivery Model and explained that sectoral feedback had been provided on the draft Terms of Reference for the second stage of the review. The lack of focus on a one-college structure was noted and welcomed by members.

Minister for the Economy's Priorities – Dr O'Shiel spoke of the significance of the Minister for the Economy's objective of regional balance and advised that local councils and Invest NI had been tasked with drafting regional plans by Summer 2024. Ms McCartan commented on colleges' role in achieving the regionalisation objective and on the sectoral infrastructure in place to support such plans.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Presentation to DfE
- Paper 05.02 Staff Briefings Presentation.

Student Achievements - Ms McCartan informed the meeting of a student's achievement in receiving a JP McManus All Ireland Scholarship, of the re-introduction of FE Awards and of the planning underway for internal celebration of success events.

DfE Visit – With reference to paper 05.02, Ms McCartan reported on a visit to the Dungannon campus by senior DfE officials noting the positive engagement held.

Northern Ireland Fire & Rescue Service (NIFRS) Learning and Development Centre – Referencing her membership of the Project Board for the NIFRS Learning and Development Centre, Ms McCartan commented on the imminent opening of the facility and on the potential for collaborations between SWC and NIFRS in some training aspects, possibly including public sector apprenticeships.

Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement (MEGA) – Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of MEGA’s proposal for a Learning Factory and spoke of the College’s interest in supporting this venture through training collaborations.

Staff Briefings – Referencing paper 05.02, Ms McCartan updated the Governing Body on the staff briefings held in the Dungannon, Enniskillen and Omagh campuses as part of the ongoing commitment to communication. Dr O’Shiel commented on the informative and challenging discussions held at the two staff briefings which he had attended.

Pay Negotiations – Ms McCartan reported on the revised pay offer made to lecturers, following extensive engagement, of an 8.4% increase plus a £1,000 valorisation to lecturers’ salary points, conditional upon withdrawal of the industrial action currently in place. She explained that whilst the offer requires business case approval, it has received the endorsement of the Minister for the Economy providing funding security for 2023/24 and 2024/25. She also commented on the commitment to an independent review in relation to pay parity with teachers.

Mrs Brunt withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

Reform to Save Scheme – Ms McCartan explained that the Reform to Save Scheme has been administered following a lengthy and detailed process. She thanked Mrs Armstrong and Mrs McDowell for their support in the appeals process and noted that the cost of the scheme will be affected by the lecturers’ pay settlement, if agreed. She also advised of the further engagement planned with a number of staff who had raised specific issues. Dr O’Shiel highlighted the importance of fairness in the process and, commenting on their involvement in the appeals panel, Mrs McDowell and Mrs Armstrong described the overall process as objective, robust and transparent and commended those involved in administering the scheme.

Evaluation of Change Programme – Ms McCartan advised on the appointment of Phillipson Performance Partners to undertake an evaluation of the Change Programme and explained that a number of governors will be interviewed as part of the evaluation process.

Budgets – Ms McCartan noted the recent commencement of the 2024/25 DfE financial year and confirmed that a budget allocation has not yet been received.

6.0 COLLEGE CURRICULUM VISION

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 College Curriculum Vision.

Ms McCartan reflected on the work underway to refresh the College’s strategic vision, reminded the Governing Body of its approval of the People Plan and Digital Strategy and invited Mr McNamee to present the proposed College Curriculum Vision which will inform the Curriculum Plan.

With reference to paper 06, Mr McNamee explained that the proposed College Curriculum Vision had been developed in the context of the change program as well as the College's revised mission, vision and values, and articulates the vision for the college experience afforded to students in terms of skills, progression and personal development. He thanked members for the comments received to date, undertook to incorporate these into the document and welcomed any further feedback.

Members commented favourably on the proposed College Curriculum Vision and suggested that specific feedback is sought from Mr Hanna as student governor.

AGREED: adoption of the College Curriculum Vision subject to the incorporation of governor feedback.

Mr McNamee 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 7 February 2024 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 07.03 Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy
- Paper 07.04 Social Media Policy
- Paper 07.05 Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Management Policy.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 7 February 2024 by apprising governors of the satisfactory assurance received following internal audit reviews of Quality Management Processes and Safeguarding.

He went on to note the Committee's review of the Corporate Risk Register, highlighting the continuing high scores in relation to the risks associated with failure to operate within budget and the inability to meet the terms of the College's contract with learners and DfE due to the ongoing industrial action. He also spoke of the Committee's comfort on the controls in place in relation to the risk associated with poor governance and loss of faith in college management following a presentation of a deep dive into this risk.

In concluding his report, Mr Ingram drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for the Governing Body's approval of the Customer Complaints and Compliments Policy, the Social Media Policy and the Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Management Policy.

In response to a suggestion from a member in relation to the risk of cyber attacks, management undertook to consider rewards for the identification of vulnerabilities.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Mrs Armstrong, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting 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 21 February 2024 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Section 75 Non-Compliance Complaints Policy
- Paper 08.03 Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy
- Paper 08.04 Access NI Policy Statement.

With reference to the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 21 February 2024, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, reported on the substantial progress made in the implementation of the People Plan as well as on the need for ongoing review of the management structure in light of staffing changes, and highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Section 75 Non-Compliance Complaints Policy, the Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy and the Access NI Policy Statement.

Following feedback from a member on the Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy, it was agreed to withdraw this policy for approval and refer it to management for further review.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Mrs Isherwood, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and approval of the Section 75 Non-Compliance Complaints Policy and the Access NI Policy Statement. 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 28 February 2024 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Financial Management Report to 31 January 2024
- Paper 09.03 Asset Management Policy.

Reporting on the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 28 February 2024, Mr Barnett, Committee Chair, reflected on the economic vision set out by the Minister for the Economy and on colleges' role in contributing to the delivery of this vision. He referenced the key strategic issues identified for the Committee's focus, highlighting the addition of 'Sustainability' to this list.

Regarding budgets, he apprised the meeting of management's satisfaction with the projected budget out-turn to 31 March 2024 as well as of the likelihood of a budget deficit in excess of £5M in 2024/25, noting the concerns raised in relation to the effectiveness of the current funding model.

He explained that barriers to the success of applications to the Student Hardship Fund had been discussed by the Committee and drew attention to its recommendation for the Governing Body's approval of the Asset Management Policy.

Mr Barnett apprised members of the College's substantial expenditure on PFI costs and advised that a meeting of the PFI Liaison Committee had been held subsequent to the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting, during which that initial cost saving proposals had been tabled by Resolis.

In response to a question on the barriers to the success of applications to the Student Hardship Fund, Ms McCartan detailed the barriers identified including the receipt of social security benefits. She commented on the steps taken to address these barriers

and explained that, with permission from DfE, surpluses from the fund had been used to provide winter supports to students. It was suggested that the Department for Communities is consulted to clarify the impact of the receipt of social security benefits on eligibility for the Student Hardship Fund scheme.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Dr Campbell, adoption of the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting and the recommendation 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 12 March 2024 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 Mobile Device Management Policy
- Paper 10.03 Plagiarism Policy
- Paper 10.04 Accuracy & Completeness of Published Information Policy
- Paper 10.05 Feedback on Assessment Policy
- Paper 10.06 Management of Work Based Learning in Higher Education Policy
- Paper 10.07 Learning Resource Centre Policy
- Paper 10.08 Centre Assessment Policy 2024 -25
- Paper 10.09 Higher Education Assessment Policy
- Paper 10.10 Exams Malpractice Policy
- Paper 10.11 Exams Conflict of Interest Policy
- Paper 10.12 Exams Word Processing Policy.

In reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 12 March 2024, Dr Quinn, Committee Chair, began by referencing the presentation received on the College Curriculum Vision noting the continuous strive for improvements to the student experience.

She went on to inform the meeting of the high demand for counselling services amongst students and of the Committee's support for a re-allocation of funding to provide additional resource in this area. She also apprised the meeting of the discussions held on the decreasing Essential Skills success rates and on the interventions in place to address the challenges identified.

With reference to the eleven policies reviewed by the Committee in papers 10.02 to 10.11, Dr Quinn then drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of these policies.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Quinn, seconded by Mr Ingram, 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 GOVERNANCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 DfE Letter on Updated Governance Documents
- Paper 11.02 Guide for Governors of NI FE Colleges
- Paper 11.03 Circular FE05-12 on Knowledge, Skills and Competences of Governing Body Members
- Paper 11.04 Updated Articles of Government
- Paper 11.05 Partnership Agreement
- Paper 11.06 Governors' Responsibilities under Partnership Agreement.

Referencing the DfE letter on updated governance documents in paper 11.01, Mrs McCauley noted the changes to the Articles of Government for SWC, the Guide for Governors of NI FE Colleges, Circular FE05-12 on Knowledge, Skills and Competences of Governing Body Members and the terms and conditions of service of governors' appointments to reflect the new Partnership Agreement between DfE and SWC. She also drew governors' attention to paper 11.06 summarising their responsibilities under the Partnership Agreement and reminded them of the requirement to have an externally facilitated review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body every three years.

Mrs McCauley went on to report that work is underway to ensure that the College's Code of Conduct for Governing Body Members is reflective of relevant Department of Finance guidance and informed members of DfE's proposal to withdraw the Code of Governance due to the duplication of its principles in more recent governance documents.

Ms McCartan explained that internal documents will be reviewed and amended to ensure compliance with the Partnership Agreement on an incremental basis.

Dr O'Shiel informed members of DfE'S request for completion of the first externally facilitated review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body by December 2024, advised that an extension to this timeframe may be requested by the sector and commented on the onerous demands of colleges under the Partnership Agreement and associated Annual Engagement Plan.

AGREED: adoption of the revised Articles of Government for South West College.

12.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12.01 List of Outstanding Actions
- Paper 12.02 Summary of Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23.

Members noted the receipt of the summary paper of the Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23 as requested at the previous Governing Body meeting.

13.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

14.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS


No further business was raised.

15.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members noted their satisfaction with the proceedings 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 12 JUNE 2024

CHAIRPERSON 

DATE 12/06/2024