

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 13 September 2023 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

PRESENT:

Mrs Libby Armstrong
Ms Siobhan Breen
Mrs Deborah Brown
Mrs Maureen Brunt
Dr Frances Campbell
Mrs Maria Curran
Dr David Cutting
Mr Jack Daly
Mrs Maria Hackett (*via MS Teams*)
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood
Ms Alana Jones Campbell (*via MS Teams*)
Ms Celine McCartan
Ms Anne McCleary
Mrs Gillian McDowell
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chairman
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams*)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Ms Moira Doherty, Deputy Secretary, DfE (*items 1.0 - 3.0 only*)
Mrs Camilla James, Head of People & Culture (*items 4.0 - 7.0 only*)
Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
Ms Louise Watson, Director of Further Education, DfE (*items 1.0 - 3.0 only*)

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting. He extended a particular welcome to Ms Doherty and Ms Watson from the Department for the Economy (DfE) and to Mrs Armstrong, Mrs Curran, Dr Cutting and Mrs Hackett as new members recently appointed to the Governing Body. He acknowledged Mr Daly's last meeting as Student Governor in the 2022/23 term and thanked him for his contribution to the Governing Body during his tenure.

Dr O'Shiel then commented on the governor appraisal process and noted the consensus to aim for a meeting duration of approximately two hours. He also reminded members of the importance of maintaining focus on students.

It was noted that all members were present.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 02.01 DAO (DoF) 03/23 – Guidance on Conflicts of Interest –
Employment Related Legal Cases
- Paper 02.02 DoF Amended Conflicts of Interest Guidance.

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

Ms McCartan drew attention to the updated DoF guidance on Conflicts of Interest and confirmed that relevant college policies and procedures would be updated to reflect the updated guidance.

3.0 DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE

DISCUSSED AND SUBSEQUENTLY UPLOADED to MS Teams:

- Paper 03 Initial Progress Against Targets.

Dr O'Shiel thanked Ms Doherty and Ms Watson for their attendance at the meeting and spoke of the Governing Body's request to receive an update on the Review of the Further Education (FE) Delivery Model. He reflected on DfE objectives for increased enrolments, reduced costs and enhanced quality in the FE sector and noted South West College's agreement with the validity of these objectives.

Ms Doherty began by speaking of the alignment of her responsibilities in her previous role in the Department for Communities with the FE sector's dual mandate to enhance both economic growth and social inclusion. She commented on the benefits of the strategic partner approach to be taken between DfE and the FE sector, on the limited scope for decision making due to the absence of an NI Assembly and NI Executive, on the importance of taking cognisance of the needs of learners at all times, on the key focus on skills at the recent NI Investment Summit, and on the challenging NI government budget scenario and the consequent need to identify potential efficiencies. She also highlighted the importance of a partnership approach in the design of any new delivery model as well as the need for analysis of the reasons for the reduced enrolments and increased costs in the sector.

Providing an update on the status of the Review of the FE Delivery Model, Ms Watson explained that the evidence gathering phase of the review had reached its conclusion and that the data gathered will be verified and analysed in conjunction with the sector with a view to co-designing options for a future delivery model based on verified evidence.

In response to questions and comments from members, Ms Doherty and Ms Watson explained that co-design of the next phase of the review will be undertaken in the forthcoming months commencing with a workshop with chairs and principals; explained that a Project Board may be established to take the review forward thereafter; advised that some initiatives may progress in parallel with the review; confirmed that the outcome of the review will be evidence based and has not been pre-determined; undertook to enhance communications with the sector on the progress of the review; commented on the need for place based solutions; accepted the need for enhanced inter-departmental policy development in relation to sixth form and wider education matters; and provided assurance that competition from schools and universities will be considered as part of the review.

With reference to paper 03, Ms McCartan detailed current enrolment statistics for FE, Higher Education (HE) and Work Based Learning (WBL) Programmes, highlighting the overall increase in both student and course enrolments from 2022/23 figures. She also noted the reduced total staff number and the consequent impact of increased efficiency.

Dr O'Shiel commented on the improvement in South West College's performance ratios since they were initially calculated in the first phase of the Review of the FE

Delivery Model and noted that such improvements at a sectoral level, coupled with altered behaviours, may eliminate the need for a significant change to the current FE delivery model, adding that a one college model is unlikely to achieve the departmental objectives for the sector. It was noted that the Strategic Alliance between Northern Regional College, North West Regional College and South West College is progressing successfully and that this model may merit further consideration.

The meeting was then made aware of the success of a number of college students at the EuroSkills competition held recently in Poland as well as of the increase in school leavers choosing to undertake HE programmes at the College.

Ms Doherty and Ms Watson were thanked for their engagement with the Governing Body and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

Members welcomed the positive engagement with Ms Doherty and Ms Watson and agreed that a follow up communication should issue from the Chair on behalf of the Governing Body to highlight the need for active engagement with the sector as well as the importance of a clear Terms of Reference for and South West College representation on the Project Board.

Mrs James, Head of People and Culture, joined the meeting at this juncture.

4.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21 JUNE 2023

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 21 June 2023.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Mrs Isherwood, 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.

5.0 CHAIR'S BUSINESS

DfE Partner Engagement Event – Dr O'Shiel informed the meeting of the attendance of the Vice Chair and Principal at a recent DfE Partner Engagement Event. Ms McCartan then updated the meeting on the key messages from the event highlighting the strategic update received from the Permanent Secretary, the progress of the Skills for a 10X Economy Strategy, the recent consultation on DfE's 2023/24 budget and the discussion on energy awareness and climate change.

6.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 DfE FE Sector Shared Priorities.

TABLED:

- Paper 06.02 College Development Plan 2022/23.

Students – Ms McCartan referenced the enrolment statistics provided earlier in the meeting. She also outlined settlement issues arising amongst a minority of students

and provided assurances on the risk assessments undertaken and the wraparound support put in place.

Strategic Planning – Ms McCartan explained that the DfE FE Sector Shared Priorities listed in paper 06.01 will be used as a basis for strategic planning. She referenced the 2022/23 College Development Plan tabled and advised that DfE’s annual College Development Plan template is under review to reflect the priorities of the Skills for a 10X Economy Strategy. She added that a Digital Services Plan and a Teaching & Learning Strategy are in development for committee and Governing Body scrutiny in due course.

Cookstown Campus – Ms McCartan reminded members of the under-utilisation of the Cookstown Campus and updated the meeting on the advanced discussions held regarding the proposal to lease a portion of the building to the Education Authority (EA) for its Youth Service. She provided assurance on the College’s plans to continue Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision in the Cookstown campus and spoke of the synergies between this provision and the EA’s Youth Service. She explained that consultations had been held with affected staff and that an anonymous letter of concern had been received. Mrs Brown then provided further detail on the content of the letter, undertook to share it with members through the Secretary to the Governing Body and reflected on the College’s commitment to listen to staff. In response to questions and comments, Ms McCartan acknowledged the natural resistance to change, undertook to ensure that affected staff are apprised of curriculum implications and spoke of her contentment with the proposed lease in light of the under-utilisation of the campus, the retention of SEN provision and the income to be generated.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram and seconded by Ms Breen, to proceed with development of a lease with the EA for a portion of the Cookstown campus and to delegate authority to the Finance & General Purposes Committee to scrutinise and confirm details of the lease.

Estates - Ms McCartan confirmed that no Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) has been used in the construction of the College’s estate.

Industrial Relations – Ms McCartan acknowledged the impact of the ongoing lecturers’ pay dispute on the culture within the College.

Change Program – Ms McCartan thanked members for their support in the implementation of the management realignment and spoke of her satisfaction with the progress of the Strategic Improvement Plan.

Connect & Plan Day – Ms McCartan reported on the Connect & Plan Day held on the return of academic staff in August 2023 noting the ‘Good Energy’ theme adopted at the event, and thanked Ms Jones Campbell for her attendance as Chair of the Staffing Committee. Ms Jones Campbell commented favourably on the content and atmosphere of the event.

Mrs Brunt made the meeting aware of the complimentary comments made by a member of staff on Ms McCartan’s leadership of the change program during a recent grievance meeting.

7.0 PEOPLE PLAN

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Draft SWC People Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25.

Dr O'Shiel thanked Mrs James for her oversight of the management realignment recruitment processes noting the positive feedback received from candidates on the equity of the process.

With reference to paper 07.01, Mrs James then provided an overview of the draft SWC People Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25 highlighting its purpose to create a framework of support for staff, its alignment with college values, its reflection of the Skills for a 10X Economy Strategy, its four aims to Reset, Restore, Refresh and Retain and its five themes of Organisational Culture, Organisational Change, Effective Leadership, Performance Management and Employee Engagement. She also drew attention to the action plan within as well as to the significant progress made in achieving the objectives listed.

In response to questions and comments from members, Mrs James outlined the consultations undertaken and communications issued to staff on the draft People Plan, undertook to consider a suggestion regarding the RAG status of actions not yet due and spoke of the importance of ensuring that all staff feel safe in their working environment.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell and seconded by Mrs McDowell, adoption of the People Plan 2022/23 – 2024/25.

Dr O'Shiel thanked Mrs James and the Human Resources team for their work in the development of the People Plan. He also thanked Ms Breen and Mrs Brown, staff governors, for their input into the change process.

Mrs James withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

8.0 APPOINTMENTS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Governing Body and Committee Membership Proposal
- Paper 08.02 Proposed Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference
- Paper 08.03 Proposed Amendments to Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

With reference to paper 08.01 Mrs McCauley drew attention to the recommendation to appoint Mrs Armstrong and Mrs Curran to the Audit & Risk Committee and Mr Cutting and Mrs Hackett to the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

She also reminded the meeting of the requirement to have members with recent and relevant financial experience on both the Audit & Risk Committee and the Finance & General Purposes Committee and referenced the proposals detailed within paper 08.01 to acquire these skills through co-option of a member to the Governing Body, who would serve on the Finance & General Purposes Committee, and co-option of a member to the Audit & Risk Committee for up to one year, the latter requiring an amendment to the Terms of Reference of the Audit & Risk Committee to align it with the Department of Finance's (DoF) Audit & Risk Assurance Committee Handbook.

Ms McCartan reported on the unsuccessful enquiries made through DfE to source a co-optee for the Audit & Risk Committee and explained that discussions are underway with a potential co-optee. In response to a query from a member, Ms McCartan acknowledged the potential for conflicts of interest and advised that any such conflict would be appropriately managed as is the case in other circumstances.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt, seconded by Mr Ingram:

- **adoption of the Committee Membership Proposal detailed in sections 3.0 and 4.0 of paper 08.01;**
- **to propose to DfE the appointment of Mr Michael Barnett to the Governing Body as a co-optee;**
- **adoption of the revised Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference;**
- **approval in principle to co-opt Mr Patrick McKeown to the Audit & Risk Committee for up to one year with appropriate remuneration and to delegate authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and Chief Executive to progress this appointment.**

9.0 REGISTER OF INTERESTS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09 Register of Governors' Interests.

The Secretary to the Governing Body drew attention to the register of governors' interests contained in paper 09 and requested timely notification of any changes in governors' interests during the 2023/24 year.

10.0 MANAGEMENT STATEMENT & FINANCIAL MEMORANDUM

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Management Statement & Financial Memorandum
- Paper 10.02 Appendices to Management Statement & Financial Memorandum.

Mrs McCauley reminded members that the Partnership Agreement with DfE, when finalised, will replace the Management Statement & Financial Memorandum and noted that the latter must be tabled at a meeting of the Governing Body annually for the information of members.

11.0 REVIEW OF STANDING ORDERS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Proposed Standing Orders
- Paper 11.02 Proposed Amendments to Standing Orders.

Mrs McCauley outlined the proposed amendments to the Governing Body's Standing Orders.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Dr Cutting, adoption of the revised Standing Orders.

12.0 2023/24 GOVERNANCE KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12 Proposed 2023/24 Governance Key Performance Indicators.

Mrs McCauley explained that the proposed 2023/24 Governance Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) had been amended to incorporate DfE feedback and that an assessment of performance against KPIs would be undertaken in September 2024.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell and seconded by Mrs Isherwood adoption of the 2023/24 Governance Key Performance Indicators.

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 commented on the value of the engagement with DfE representatives during the meeting as well as on the value of the engagement with the Executive team prior to the meeting.

Ms Breen, Mrs Brown and Mr Daly withdrew from the meeting at this juncture. The meeting then went into confidential session and concluded at 8:15 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2023

CHAIRMAN



DATE 15/11/2023

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	13/09/2023	6.0	Letter of concern regarding Cookstown campus to be circulated to Governing Body members.