

## SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**  
held on Wednesday 15 November 2023 at 5:30 pm  
in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus

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**PRESENT:**

Mrs Libby Armstrong  
Mr Michael Barnett  
Ms Siobhan Breen  
Mrs Deborah Brown (*via MS Teams*)  
Mrs Maureen Brunt  
Dr Frances Campbell  
Mrs Maria Curran (*from item 5.0*)  
Dr David Cutting (*via MS Teams*)  
Mrs Maria Hackett  
Ms Alana Jones Campbell  
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive  
Ms Anne McCleary  
Mrs Gillian McDowell (*via MS Teams*)  
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chairman  
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams*)

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mr Diarmuid Hanna, Incoming Student Governor  
Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body  
Mr Pdraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum

**APOLOGIES:**

Mr Brian Ingram  
Mrs Sandra Isherwood

### **1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES**

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting, extending a specific welcome to Mr Barnett, recently appointed governor, Mr Hanna, incoming Student Governor, and Mr McNamee, Director of Curriculum. He also acknowledged Ms Breen's last meeting as Staff Governor and thanked her for her contribution to the Governing Body during her tenure and for her work on the Change Team in particular. He advised that Mr Tom Corr would replace Ms Breen as Academic Staff Governor.

Dr O'Shiel then extended his sympathies and those of the Governing Body to Dr Quinn on her recent bereavement.

An apology was tendered on behalf of Mr Ingram and Mrs Isherwood.

### **2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

### **3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 13 SEPTEMBER 2023**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03                      Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 13 September 2023.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Breen and seconded by Mrs Brunt, 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 04.01 Strategic Alliance Update.

**Budget** – Dr O'Shiel reported on recent engagements with the Department for the Economy (DfE) regarding budgets and commented on his satisfaction with the College's approach to generating efficiencies and the continued efforts to identify further cost saving measures. In response to a query on reported campus closures in the sector, Dr O'Shiel provided assurances that the closure of campuses is not under consideration by South West College.

**Review of Further Education Delivery Model** – For the benefit of new members Dr O'Shiel outlined the background to the Review of the Further Education (FE) Delivery Model. He explained that the co-design process reported by DfE representatives at the previous Governing Body meeting had commenced with a workshop involving delegates from the six colleges. It was noted that the representations made by the Governing Body at the previous meeting had been considered by DfE.

**Strategic Alliance** – Dr O'Shiel reflected on the establishment of a Strategic Alliance with Northern Regional College and North West Regional College to pilot an alternative to the one-college FE delivery model option to achieve DfE objectives for the sector of increasing enrolments, reducing costs and enhancing quality. He then reported on the regular meetings held by the Task & Finish Group and the six working groups to share information and enhance collaboration.

**Governing Body Strategy Meeting** – Dr O'Shiel reminded members of the Governing Body Strategy Meeting scheduled to take place on Wednesday 6 December 2023 in the Erne campus and encouraged all members to attend in person.

**Audit & Risk Committee Membership** – Dr O'Shiel apprised the meeting of the proposal to appoint Mr Corr and Dr Quinn to the Audit & Risk Committee.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell and seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, to appoint Mr Corr and Dr Quinn to the Audit & Risk Committee.**

#### **5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

**Students** – Ms McCartan highlighted the shift in focus from student recruitment to curriculum delivery; referenced a range of student support events held and planned; reported on student and staff mobility trips; advised of student participation in the WorldSkills competition and internal Project Based Learning competitions; and informed the meeting of the request received to host the WorldSkills competition in 2024.

***Mrs Curran joined the meeting at this juncture.***

**Industrial Action** – Ms McCartan reported on the continuing industrial action taken by University & College Union (UCU) members, advising of the proportion of staff participating in the strike action and of the impact on students. She acknowledged the fractious industrial relations sectorally as well as the adverse local press coverage

referencing lecturers' strike action and the proposed Reform to Save Scheme, and commented on the satisfactory employee relations demonstrated internally.

**Higher Education Graduation** – Ms McCartan provided details of the forthcoming Higher Education (HE) graduation ceremonies and encouraged governors to attend.

**External Engagements** – Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of engagements with external stakeholders including DfE, principals of Scottish colleges and Irish Education & Training Boards.

**Trade Union Meetings** – Ms McCartan confirmed that a joint meeting with local trade union representatives had taken place as scheduled for the first term.

**Change Programme** – Ms McCartan reported on amendments to the membership of the Change Team. She also explained that the third 'We're Listening' Staff Engagement Survey is currently open and that a reduction in satisfaction could be expected in light of the ongoing industrial action.

**Artificial Intelligence Event** – Ms McCartan reminded members of their invitation to a forthcoming Business & Industry Support Artificial Intelligence Event.

Ms McCartan invited Mr Hanna to comment on any aspect of the student experience at which point he raised the adverse impact of the industrial action on the workload of lecturers not participating in strike action.

## **6.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Minutes of 27 September 2023 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 06.02 2022/23 Internal Audit Assurance Report
- Paper 06.03 Minutes of 8 November 2023 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 06.04 2023/24 Mid-Year Assurance Statement
- Paper 06.05 Non-Compliance Follow Up Report
- Paper 06.06 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 06.08 Freedom to Speak Up: Raising a Concern Policy
- Paper 06.09 Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report.

In the absence of the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, Ms Jones Campbell explained that two committee meetings had been held since the last Governing Body meeting. She referenced the Committee's receipt of the 2022/23 Internal Audit Assurance Report at its 27 September 2023 meeting highlighting the 'satisfactory' assurance awarded. She explained that the 2022/23 Report to Those Charged with Governance and final 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements were not available for the Committee's review at its 8 November 2023 meeting and that a special meeting has been arranged to facilitate this. She advised of the NI Audit Office's early indications of an unqualified audit opinion in relation to the 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements; noted the escalation of three risks on the Corporate Risk Register; drew attention to the 2022/23 Audit Committee Annual Report for the attention of the Governing Body and the Accounting Officer; and highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Freedom to Speak Up: Raising a Concern Policy.

The Freedom to Speak Up: Raising a Concern Policy was approved by the Governing Body subject to an amendment to correct an error identified by a member.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Dr Quinn, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting and the recommendation therein.**

## **7.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 4 October 2023 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Paper 07.03 Employee Standards & Ethical Practice Policy
- Paper 07.04 Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

With reference to paper 07.01, Ms Jones Campbell, Chair of the Staffing Committee, began her report by welcoming the funding secured to support the Change Program in 2023/24 enabling the delivery of a Leadership Development Program in the College. She went on to inform the meeting of the above target sickness absence rate in 2022/23, of the procurement of specialist resource to support the administration of the Reform to Save / Cost Reduction Scheme in order to mitigate the risks posed, and of the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy, the Employee Standards & Ethical Practice Policy and the Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Ms Breen, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.**

## **8.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 18 October 2023 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 2022/23 Financial Management Report
- Paper 08.03 2023/24 Student Hardship Fund Policy & Procedure
- Paper 08.04 Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference.

Reporting on the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 18 October 2023, Dr O'Shiel, Presiding Committee Chair, advised that updates had been provided by Ms McCartan on Long Term Financial Planning and the Review of the FE Delivery Model. He went on to reference the Management Report received noting the 2023/24 budget update received, the reduction in insurance costs and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Student Hardship Fund Policy & Procedure.

Ms McCartan provided assurances on the expectation of a within budget out-turn for 2023/24 due to the focus on efficiencies, additional DfE allocations and income generated. She also confirmed the completion of the sale of the Fairview campus; noted the advanced negotiations with the Education Authority (EA) regarding the lease of a portion of the Cookstown campus; spoke of the good impact of the relocation of a number of staff from the Cookstown campus to the Dungannon campus; and reported on the PFI Liaison Committee meeting held with Resolis at which a focus on sustainability and service delivery was requested by the College.

In response to questions from members, the meeting was apprised of the submission of a business case to DfE for approval to pay outstanding holiday entitlements following the judgment made in relation to the PSNI v Agnew case; acknowledged the potential for stigma in relation to the Student Hardship Fund; was made aware of the changes made by Mitie to increase the choices available to students receiving Free School Meals; and were advised of the examination of software licensing with a view to identifying cost saving opportunities. Management also undertook to amend errors identified in the 2022/23 Financial Management Report and the 2023/24 Student Hardship Fund Policy & Procedure.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Dr O’Shiel, seconded by Mrs Brunt, 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.**

## **9.0 CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 25 October 2023 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 2022-24 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan
- Paper 09.03 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference.

Dr Campbell, on behalf of the Presiding Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on Wednesday 25 October 2023, drew attention to the updates received on the Committee’s key strategic issues and listed the new key strategic issues agreed following review as Curriculum Profile, Student Experience, Essential Skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and Review of Special Educational Needs Provision.

She also referenced the Management Report presented to the Committee highlighting the Quality Assurance Report and the potential disruption to support by Awarding Organisations for traditional FE awards used in Northern Ireland arising from the introduction of T Levels in England. She also noted the Committee’s recommendation for approval of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Campbell, seconded by Ms McCleary, adoption of the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting and the recommendation therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.**

## **10.0 2022/23 GOVERNING BODY SELF-ASSESSMENT EXERCISE**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Cover Letter to 2022/23 Governing Body Self-Assessment Exercise Analysis Report
- Paper 10.02 2022/23 Governing Body Self-Assessment Exercise Analysis Report.

Drawing attention to the 2022/23 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 2021/22 results and welcomed feedback from members at any time on any aspect of the Governing Body’s operations.

**11.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that the letter of concern regarding the Cookstown campus had been circulated to governors.

**12.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED**

No declarations were made under this heading.

**13.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

In response to a question on the lack of assurance in the 2023/24 Mid-Year Assurance Statement on account management, Ms McCartan explained that the procedure for deactivation of the accounts of leavers has now been amended to address the concern identified.

In response to a question on compliance with mandatory training, Ms McCartan advised of the requirement for all staff to complete the ten internal corporate training modules. She added that levels of completion are not satisfactory and advised of the measures in place to enhance compliance in this area. Members commented on their need to receive assurance on this at a future meeting.

**14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING**

Dr O’Shiel reflected on the College’s satisfactory position in relation to budgets, efficiencies, quality and recruitment and spoke of the objective of delivering effective meetings.

*Ms Breen, Mrs Brown 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 31 JANUARY 2024**

**CHAIRMAN**



**DATE** 31/01/2024