

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 2 April 2025 at 5:30 pm
in the Boardroom, Omagh Campus

PRESENT:

Mrs Libby Armstrong
Mr Michael Barnett
Mrs Maureen Brunt
Dr Frances Campbell
Mr Tom Corr
Dr David Cutting (*via MS Teams*)
Mrs Maria Hackett
Mr Diarmuid Hanna
Mr Brian Ingram
Mrs Sandra Isherwood (*via MS Teams*)
Ms Alana Jones Campbell
Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
Ms Anne McCleary
Mrs Gillian McDowell
Dr Nichola Melanaphy
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams*)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
Mr Padraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting and noted that all members were present.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 5 FEBRUARY 2025

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Minutes of 5 February 2025 Governing Body Meeting.

Minute Ref. 5.3 – Dr O'Shiel reported on the establishment of a Projects Oversight Committee to provide an enhanced governance framework of externally funded projects in light of the increased number and complexity of such projects.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell 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

Governor Resignation – Dr O'Shiel informed the meeting of the recent resignation of Mrs Curran from the Governing Body due to workload pressures. He apprised the meeting of the Department for the Economy's (DfE) role in appointing a replacement governor and of the indications of a protracted recruitment period. The risk posed by the skills gap in the area of finance was raised and it was suggested that the possibility of appointing a third co-optee is explored with DfE.

Sectoral Collaboration – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of the function of the Colleges' Employers Forum (CEF) and reported on the development of a revised constitution which will be presented to the Governing Body for consideration in due course. Mr Ingram advised of a potential meeting of the Chairs of the sectoral Audit & Risk Committees.

Review of the Effectiveness of the Governing Body – Dr O'Shiel confirmed that a draft report had been received from Innovation & Consultancy Services (ICS) following its review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body. He added that the draft report had confirmed the Governing Body's effectiveness, that a feedback meeting has been arranged and that the final report will be presented to the Governing Body in due course.

Accountability Meeting with DfE – Dr O'Shiel referenced his attendance, along with the Chief Executive, the Director of Curriculum and the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, at the annual Accountability Meeting with DfE, commenting on the positive bilateral engagement held.

Approval Under Delegated Authority – Dr O'Shiel reported his approval of a number of staff requests, fixed term contract proposals and other resourcing matters considered and recommended for approval by the Staffing Committee.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

5.1 Accountability Meeting

Ms McCartan provided an overview of the Accountability Meeting held with DfE noting the updates provided by the College on curriculum and financial performance, externally funded projects, partnerships, sectoral collaboration, the development of the Strategic Plan, the Erne Campus Gateway 5 Review, the progress of the change process, feedback from staff surveys, Reform to Save Scheme savings and workforce challenges. She also highlighted the representations made in relation to the equitable division of any sectoral funding gaps and resolution of the lecturers' pay dispute.

Mr Ingram congratulated the Chief Executive and Director of Curriculum for their comprehensive presentation of the status of the College at the Accountability Meeting and their diplomatic conduct in raising contentious matters. He commented on Departmental representatives' recognition of the College's good performance, the sectoral inequity in senior staff pay and the industrial relations challenges.

Mr McNamee noted the positive reaction received from Departmental representatives on the presentation made and the matters raised as well as their acknowledgement of the need to recognise efficiency and good performance in the budget allocation process.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to circulate the slide deck of the presentation delivered at the Accountability Meeting.

5.2 2025/26 Budget

Ms McCartan advised that the 2025/26 budget allocation is unlikely to be finalised prior to June 2025.

5.3 Strategic Projects

Ms McCartan confirmed the signing of Letters of Offer for the Smart Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment (STRIDE) project and the Green Accelerator Skills Project (GRASP) funded under the Peace Plus Programme. She also reported the award of funding for the Powering Research & Innovation for Sustainable Manufacturing (PRISM) project and outlined the objectives, partners and budget involved.

Dr O'Shiel commented on the significance of the projects cited and extended the Governing Body's congratulations to those involved in the success of the applications for funding for these projects.

5.4 Industrial Action

Ms McCartan reported on the declarations of trade dispute received from trade unions over workload and pay issues, on the subsequent receipt of the results of a ballot of UCU members indicating an appetite for industrial action, and on DfE's assertion of the unaffordability of pay increases.

Dr O'Shiel advised that meetings had been held between the Minister for the Economy and trade unions and between the Minister for the Economy and CEF on the matter.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to circulate correspondence received on the outcome of the UCU ballot on industrial action.

5.5 Strategic Plan Development

Ms McCartan reported on the ongoing development of the Strategic Plan and undertook to circulate the draft plan to members.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to circulate the draft Strategic Plan.

5.6 Student Matters

Ms McCartan informed members of the success of the College, its students and its partners in the Worldskills competition, the NI Apprenticeship Awards and the Association of Colleges (AoC) Beacon Awards.

The meeting was also apprised of the recently held Get Engineering event and taster event for school students as well as of the forthcoming Apprentice Connect events.

6.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Minutes of 19 February 2025 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 06.02 Corporate Risk Register.

With reference to the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on Wednesday 19 February 2025, Mr Ingram, Committee Chair, highlighted the 'satisfactory' assurance received following an internal audit of Student Experience & Engagement, noting the continuing progress of the 2024/25 Internal Audit Plan; drew attention to the Corporate Risk Register, noting the de-escalation of two risks for management at Directorate level; confirmed the high degree of assurance held by the Committee following the receipt of a presentation of the management of the risks

associated with Health & Safety; commented on the resource challenge in preparing Accounts Packs and supporting documentation in relation to the audit of the 2024/25 DfE Group Annual Report & Accounts; and apprised the meeting of the pending assessment for Cyber Essentials and Cyber Essentials Plus re-accreditation and of the significant progress made in the resolution of the IT issues previously encountered.

In response to a question from a member, Ms McCartan outlined the function of simulated phishing attacks and commented on her comfort with staff response to such attacks.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Mr Barnett, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

7.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 26 February 2025 Staffing Committee Meeting.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on 26 February 2025, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, spoke of the need for a fresh approach to strategic workforce planning in light of ongoing recruitment and retention challenges and budget constraints; referenced the resourcing pressures encountered within the Human Resources team as well as the difficulties in accessing comprehensive Occupational Health services; noted the potential for industrial action by academic staff; highlighted the Committee's concerns regarding the potential for precedent in the proposal to align the allowance offered to First Aiders and Mental Health First Aiders with that offered by the Education Authority; and reported good progress in staff compliance with completion of corporate training modules.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Mr Ingram, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting. 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 12 March 2025 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Financial Management Report to 31 January 2025.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 12 March 2025 by outlining the discussions held on the 2025/26 budget position and paying tribute to the finance team for the analysis undertaken in relation to potential budget scenarios. He went on to apprise governors of the good financial performance evidenced in relation to the budget to 31 March 2025, highlighting the indications of a within budget out-turn; draw attention to the Financial Management Report for the six months from August 2024 to January 2025, noting the expectation of a closure of variances by the statutory year end of 31 July 2025; and reference the update provided to the Committee on the status of the investigations undertaken in relation to the issues encountered in the training and preparatory kitchens in the Erne Campus.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting. 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 19 March 2025 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 FE WBL Centre Assessment Policy 2025-26
- Paper 09.03 Post 16 PTE Handbook 2025-2027
- Paper 09.04 SWC Student Personal Mobile Device Guidance
- Paper 09.05 HE Admissions, Admission Appeals and RPL Policy
- Paper 09.06 Student Disciplinary Policy
- Paper 09.07 Student Disciplinary Procedure
- Paper 09.08 Admissions Policy
- Paper 09.09 Admissions Procedure.

In relation to the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 19 March 2025, Mrs Isherwood, Committee Chair, provided an overview of the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues including the development of apprenticeships in non-traditional areas, the increase in the delivery of online and hybrid programmes, the initiatives to support students with special educational needs (SEN), the steps taken to address challenges in Essential Skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) success rates and progress in the development of a strategic plan.

She went on to reference the Management Report received by the Committee noting the updates received on performance against curriculum targets, social inclusion initiatives, funded projects and the alternative curriculum delivery arrangements put in place to facilitate the investigations and maintenance underway in the training and preparatory kitchens in the Erne Campus. She also highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the FE WBL Centre Assessment Policy 2025-26, the Post 16 PTE Handbook 2025-2027, the Student Personal Mobile Device Guidance, the HE Admissions, Admission Appeals and RPL Policy, the Student Disciplinary Policy, the Student Disciplinary Procedure, the Admissions Policy and the Admissions Procedure.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Dr Campbell, 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.

10.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that all actions had been implemented.

11.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this item.

12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

13.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented on the effectiveness of the meeting.

*Mr Corr, Mr Hanna and Dr Melanaphy withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.
The meeting then went into confidential session.*

**CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY
18 JUNE 2025**

PRESIDING CHAIR

Brian Ingram

DATE 18/06/2025

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	02/04/2025	5.1	Ms McCartan to circulate the slide deck of the presentation delivered at the Accountability Meeting.
2	02/04/2025	5.4	Ms McCartan to circulate correspondence received on the outcome of the UCU ballot on industrial action.
3	02/04/2025	5.5	Ms McCartan to circulate the draft Strategic Plan.