SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Staffing Committee** of **South West College**
held on **Wednesday 23 September 2026** at 9:00 am via MS Teams

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PRESENT:	Mrs Libby Armstrong, Committee Chair Dr David Cutting Mr Brian Ingram Ms Anne McCleary
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Camilla James, Head of People & Culture Mrs Sharon McGrath, Director of Corporate Services Mrs Nicola Nugent, Acting Secretary to the Governing Body
APOLOGIES:	Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Ms McCartan, who advised that she would join the meeting for consideration of the Reserved Section.

The Committee noted that Mrs McDowell had completed her term of office as a member of the Governing Body. Members expressed their sincere thanks for her commitment and contribution to the work of the Staffing Committee and wished her well for the future.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Mrs Armstrong declared her position as a board member of the Labour Relations Agency and a panel member of the Fair Employment and Industrial Tribunals NI. Mrs James, Mrs McGrath and Mrs Nugent declared conflicts in relation to specific staffing issues arising under Confidential and Reserved matters.

3.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 13 May 2026.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

4.0 KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Key Strategic Issues Update.

4.1 Culture & Engagement

Mrs McGrath provided an update on the work of the Culture & Engagement Team and its priorities for 2026/27. The Committee noted that activity would continue to align with the People Plan and the Governance & Culture strategic priority, focusing on staff

voice, communication, leadership visibility, recognition, induction, appraisal, team development and values-led behaviours.

Members noted positive feedback from the June and August Connect and Plan Days and were advised that the Team's membership and Terms of Reference were currently under review.

The Committee further noted ongoing work to progress the Culture & Engagement Action Plan, staff recognition initiatives, appraisal development and the embedding of coaching approaches across the College. Mrs McGrath reported that nine Coaching Advisors had completed the Coaching for Growth programme and would support its implementation across the College.

4.2 **Staff Recruitment & Retention**

Mrs McGrath reported that recruitment and retention activity continued to be considered in the context of immediate operational pressures and longer-term workforce planning under the People Plan. Members welcomed confirmation that all IT vacancies across curriculum and support areas had been filled, providing increased stability within a key service area, while noting that specialist recruitment challenges can remain cyclical.

The Committee was advised that a structured progression pathway had been established within IT Services and that the measures implemented were supporting workforce stability. Members noted that the associated Corporate Risk Register entry was under review, including consideration of a reduced risk rating while retaining the matter for ongoing monitoring.

Mrs James advised that incremental credit for relevant previous experience had been introduced across academic appointments, with limited exceptions, which had assisted recruitment. Members also noted that recent Classroom Assistant recruitment exercises had been successful and welcomed the healthy intake to the Teaching and Learning Fast Track Programme.

The Committee noted the update and received assurance that recruitment, retention and workforce planning activity would continue to be monitored through the People Plan and associated management reporting arrangements.

4.3 **The People Plan**

The Committee noted that the People Plan 2025-2029 had been approved by the Committee in May 2026 and subsequently by the Governing Body. Implementation planning had progressed, with priority actions aligned to established governance structures and operational workstreams.

Members noted that implementation activity included the Culture & Engagement Team, Employee Engagement Plan, recruitment and retention, induction and probation, appraisal improvement, leadership development and Coaching for Growth Phase 2. Management advised that the proposed external recruitment to the senior People and Culture role was progressing.

4.4 **Industrial Relations**

Mrs McGrath updated the Committee on sector-wide industrial relations activity through the Colleges Employers' Forum, the Non-Teaching Staff Negotiating

Committee, the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee and local Trade Union consultation arrangements.

Members noted that temporary approval had been granted for the support staff increment approved by the Department for the Economy and that work continued on the lecturers' pay remit business case, including consideration of pay parity between lecturers and teachers. The Committee was advised that the matter remained subject to Departmental review and the relevant sector and College approvals.

The Committee also noted that the Lecturer Regional Workload Agreement 2026-2027 (Paper 05.03) was now operational and that training for Academic Managers had been arranged to support consistent implementation. Engagement would continue with recognised Trade Unions and, where appropriate, the Labour Relations Agency.

In considering the Key Strategic Issues report, members reviewed whether the current structure continued to reflect the College's key people-related risks and priorities.

AGREED: that the current structure of the Key Strategic Issues report is retained, with Culture & Engagement continuing as a standalone strategic issue, and that the position is kept under review as implementation of the People Plan progresses.

5.0 MANAGEMENT REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Management Report
- Paper 05.01 Term 3 Sickness Absence Summary for 2025-2026
- Paper 05.02 Equality Progress Report
- Paper 05.03 CEF Circular 2026-02 Lecturer Regional Workload Agreement 2026-2027
- Paper 05.04 260630 Letter from DfE – HR Policies
- Paper 05.05 Vacancy Management Principles – July 2026.

5.1 Workforce Development

Ref: Management Report Section 2.0

Management outlined the workforce development priorities for 2026/27, aligned to the People Plan and focused on strengthening workforce capacity and capability. Planned activity included a College-wide training needs analysis, a refreshed CPD programme, the reintroduction of in-house Assessor and Internal Quality Assurance qualifications, and support for Advance HE candidates.

Members noted that refreshed corporate modules had been issued earlier than in previous years, with a current completion rate of 65%. Progress would continue to be monitored through Management Operations Meetings and by line managers. Consistent with the arrangements applied in the previous two academic years, Part-Time Lecturers would receive payment equivalent to 2.5 hours at Grade 5 for completion of the corporate modules.

The Committee also noted that seven staff were enrolled on the Certificate in Teaching and 11 were undertaking the PGCE. Ms James advised that all Full-Time and Associate Lecturers are required to hold, or be working towards, a recognised teaching qualification, with the PGCE required within the first three years of appointment where not already held.

5.2 Absence Management 2025-2026

Ref: Management Report Section 3.0 and Paper 05.01

Management presented the final sickness absence position for 2025/26. The Committee noted that overall sickness absence was 3.87%, reducing across the year from 4.44% in Term 1 and 4.23% in Term 2 to 2.96% in Term 3.

Members noted that personal stress remained a significant cause of absence, while hospital/post-operative absence and work-related stress continued to require close monitoring.

The Committee further noted that long-term sickness remained the principal contributor to absence levels. Overall absence remained broadly consistent with the previous two academic years, although the growth in work-related stress over the three-year period was identified as an emerging trend.

5.3 Equality

Ref: Management Report Section 4.0 and Paper 05.02

Management presented an update on equality, diversity and inclusion activity during 2025/26. The Committee noted progress in policy screening, inclusive recruitment practices, reasonable adjustments and the achievement of the Autism NI Impact Award. No policies were identified as requiring a full Equality Impact Assessment.

Members also noted progress in staff development, wellbeing and flexible working initiatives, including the introduction of a Quiet Room. The Committee welcomed the initiative and supported exploring the provision of similar facilities across all College campuses.

Priorities for 2026/27 included continued policy screening, strengthened equality monitoring, development of an Equality Action Plan and further embedding of inclusive practices across the College.

Mrs James presented the Annual Equality and Good Relations Progress Report for consideration prior to submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland. Members commended the quality of the report and recognised it as a strong reflection of the College's commitment to promoting equality, diversity, inclusion and good relations.

AGREED: that the Annual Equality and Good Relations Progress Report is approved for submission to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland.

5.4 Sector Matters

5.4.1 Lecturer Regional Workload Agreement 2026-2027

Ref: Management Report Section 5.1 and Paper 05.03

The Committee received CEF Circular 2026/02 for information. Management advised that the agreement clarified implementation of the 2012 lecturer contract and was intended to support fair and consistent workload allocation across the six further education colleges from 2026/27.

Members noted that the agreement addressed programmes of duties, student contact time, associated duties, reduced student contact time, class cover, post-entry training, preparation and marking, programme coordination, internal quality assurance, travel, CPD, administration and arrangements for Associate Lecturers. Academic manager training was scheduled for 24 September 2026.

5.4.2 Sector HR Policies
Ref: Management Report Section 5.2 and Paper 05.04

The Committee noted correspondence from DfE regarding the sector-wide review of HR policies. While DfE emphasised the importance of progressing the review programme at pace, Management advised that significant work had already been completed and that a number of policies were progressing through the final consultation, approval and governance stages.

Members noted that future sector updates would provide assurance on progress against the review programme, including the status of policies awaiting final approval, key risks and any matters requiring Departmental input.

5.5 Other Resourcing Matters

5.5.1 Recruitment and Vacancy Management
Ref: Management Report Section 6.1 and Paper 05.05

Management reported that the HR team had managed 37 recruitment exercises during Term 3, eight of which were readvertised after no successful appointment was made initially.

The Committee noted the Vacancy Management Principles developed in response to challenging financial conditions and uncertainty regarding core budget allocations. Members noted that the framework did not constitute a vacancy freeze but required staffing decisions to be affordable, evidence-based and aligned to College priorities, while protecting student safety, safeguarding, curriculum delivery, statutory compliance, essential support and business-critical services.

5.5.2 Additional Hours
Ref: Management Report Section 6.2

The Committee noted that Associate Lecturers had been invited to express an interest in additional hours on a temporary basis. A protocol remained in place to ensure that no Associate Lecturer was timetabled beyond 828 annual hours, equivalent to the full-time lecturer student contact requirement, and that working time limits were observed. Where resources were limited, full-time lecturers could also express an interest in additional hours, subject to prior approval by the Curriculum Director.

5.5.3 Social and Wellbeing
Ref: Management Report Section 6.3

Management advised that the Social and Wellbeing Committee had met the previous day and agreed its programme of activity for the academic year. The cross-campus structure remained in place, with a Chair and two Deputy Chairs representing the three main campuses. Additional members were being sought to strengthen representation of the wider staff body.

6.0 REVIEW OF STAFFING COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

The Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference as part of the annual governance cycle. During discussion, members agreed that the appointment period for Committee members should be amended to state that appointments are normally for a period of two years.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Dr Cutting, that the Staffing Committee Terms of Reference, as amended, are recommended to the Governing Body for approval.

7.0 PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS 2026/27

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07 Proposed Programme of Business 2026/27.

The Committee considered the proposed Programme of Business for 2026/27, which aligned scheduled reports and governance reviews to the Committee's meeting cycle.

AGREED: acceptance of the Programme of Staffing Committee Business for 2026/27.

8.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08 List of Outstanding Actions

The Committee noted that there were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

9.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

10.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF THE MEETING

Members commented favourably on the proceedings of the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 9.49 am.

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

GB CHAIRPERSON _____ DATE _____