SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee**
held on Wednesday 30 September 2026 at 5.00 pm
in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus and via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:	Mrs Maureen Brunt Dr Frances Campbell Mr Tom Corr Mrs Sandra Isherwood, Committee Chair Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive *(via MS Teams)* Dr Nichola Melanaphy
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mr Ciaran McManus, Interim Deputy Chief Executive Mr Padraig McNamee, Acting Chief Executive Mrs Nicola Nugent, Acting Secretary to the Governing Body
APOLOGIES:	Dr David Cutting Mrs Maria Hackett Dr Lynsey Quinn

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Mrs Isherwood welcomed all members to the first Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting of 2026/27.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mr Cutting, Mrs Hackett and Dr Quinn.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Mr Corr declared an interest in Paper 05.06 due to his involvement with Row the Erne.

3.0 MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of 03 June 2026 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting.

There were no issues arising.

4.0 KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Management Update on Key Strategic Issues
- Paper 04.02 Emerging Cross-Cutting Priorities.

4.1 Curriculum Strategy, CDP Performance and Provision Sustainability

Mr McNamee reported that recruitment for 2026/27 was positive overall, with strong

demand across Engineering, Construction, Electrical Installation, Plumbing and a range of apprenticeship and vocational programmes. He noted weaker recruitment within some part-time FE, HE and HLA provision and spoke of the need to rebalance the curriculum towards areas of demonstrated demand while ensuring sufficient staffing, accommodation and financial capacity. The Committee also noted the potential impact of planned curriculum reductions on learner access, progression pathways, regional provision, employer need and the retention of specialist capability.

During discussion, Mr McNamee clarified that the reduction of 720 enrolment places included both planned reductions and courses withdrawn due to viability concerns and confirmed that discrete SEN provision had not been disproportionately affected. Members noted the impact of travel and wider financial pressures on learners and that courses were combined, where possible, to maximise resources. Mr McNamee confirmed that the College would rural-proof its approach and draw on all relevant evidence to inform the development of a new funding model.

4.2 **Learner Experience, Teaching Quality and Student Support**

Mr McNamee reported generally positive learner feedback, effective induction activity and strong student engagement through competitions, employer activity, entrepreneurship and other enrichment opportunities. He noted that programme performance remained variable and advised that lower-performing provision was being monitored through attendance and learner-progress data. The Committee also noted the need to make greater use of in-year intelligence to support early intervention and to demonstrate the impact of quality improvement activity on learner experience, retention, achievement and progression.

4.3 **SEN, Inclusive Provision and Supported Employment**

Mr McNamee advised that inclusive learning remained a key strategic commitment and referenced the findings of the sector-wide evaluation of SEN/D provision, which identified the need for stronger transition arrangements, more consistent use of learner outcome data and sustainable regional provision. The Committee noted continuing pressures relating to Learning Support Worker availability and teaching and assessment capacity and the importance of supporting learners from entry to College through to further learning, apprenticeships, supported employment, employment or greater independence.

4.4 **Essential Skills, Traineeships and Learner Progression**

Mr McNamee reported on the continued implementation of improvement activity arising from the evaluations of Essential Skills and Traineeships, noting positive findings in relation to induction, teaching support and preparation for progression, alongside areas requiring further improvement. He commented on the volume and complexity of the associated action plans, data returns and reporting requirements and emphasised that these should reinforce rather than duplicate established quality improvement processes, with success measured through sustained improvement in achievement and learner progression.

4.5 **Partnerships, Employer Engagement and External Funding**

Mr McNamee reported that partnership and employer engagement continued to support curriculum relevance, learner progression and regional economic development and highlighted the significance of apprenticeship activity in meeting demand across Engineering, Construction and related technical areas. He also referred to the opportunities provided through diverse funding streams, which aligned with DfE strategic

priorities, and emphasised that this contribution should be recognised in future funding allocations. It was noted that much of the information requested was already available.

4.6 Emerging Cross-Cutting Priorities

Mr McNamee advised that four emerging issues had become sufficiently significant to warrant specific oversight. These were considered cross-cutting issues affecting delivery of the five established strategic priorities rather than replacements for them.

4.6.1 Financial Sustainability, Curriculum Affordability and Regional Access

Mr McNamee highlighted the increasing influence of financial constraints on the size and shape of the curriculum and the particular implications for the College's rural catchment. He emphasised the need to develop the strongest possible evidence of the impact and public value of the College's provision and to make the case for a funding model that reflected the particular characteristics of SWC and aligned with the Minister's priorities. The Committee noted the importance of considering the cumulative impact of curriculum reductions on learner access, equality, progression routes, regional provision and the retention of specialist capability.

The Committee agreed that Financial Sustainability, Curriculum Affordability and Regional Access should be adopted as a key strategic issue and that relevant work already undertaken by CCMS should be considered. Members also raised concerns regarding the IT network and the need for an improved service.

4.6.2 Workforce Capacity, Specialist Skills and Organisational Resilience

Mr McNamee apprised the Committee of workforce pressures across a range of curriculum and support areas. He advised that workforce planning should be more closely aligned with the Three-Year Curriculum Strategy, with continued oversight of specialist recruitment, critical skills gaps, succession risks and reliance on temporary or part-time cover. In view of the current position, the Committee agreed that the issue should be de-escalated.

4.6.3 FE Reform, Curriculum Transformation and Future Delivery Models

Mr McNamee reported on DfE's *Further Education: Fit for the Future* programme and its potential implications for the College's curriculum, funding arrangements, regional role and performance framework. He spoke of the need for the College to influence the reform process while preparing for its implications across the learner progression continuum and the Three-Year Curriculum Strategy. Given the scale of the proposed sectoral redesign, the Committee agreed that regular updates should be provided and that FE Reform should be adopted as a new key strategic issue.

4.6.4 Operational Capacity, Accommodation and Health and Safety

Mr McNamee advised that accommodation, equipment and operational capacity pressures had reduced and were not now considered as significant as previously anticipated. The Committee noted, however, the continued interdependence between curriculum demand, financial sustainability, workforce and learner-support capacity, accommodation and regional access, and the importance of considering the cumulative impact of curriculum and efficiency decisions on learners, equality, progression, regional provision and the retention of specialist capability.

AGREED: The Committee noted progress and emerging concerns in relation to the five

agreed strategic issues and four emerging cross-cutting priorities. It was agreed that Financial Sustainability, Curriculum Affordability and Regional Access, and FE Reform, Curriculum Transformation and Future Delivery Models would be adopted as Key Strategic Issues and included in future updates.

5.0 MANAGEMENT REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Management Report
- Paper 05.01 CDP Update
- Paper 05.02 Apprenticeship Hub Report
- Paper 05.03 Quality Report
- Paper 05.04 Safeguarding Report
- Paper 05.05 Business Development Report
- Paper 05.06 Social Inclusion Report
- Paper 05.07 Marketing Report
- Paper 05.08 Anti-Bullying Policy for Students
- Paper 05.09 Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Paper 05.10 Learner Work Placement Experience Policy
- Paper 05.11 Student Attendance Policy
- Paper 05.12 SWC Terms & Conditions 2027/28.

5.1 College Development Plan

Ref: Management Report Section 2 and Papers 05.01 and 05.02

Mr McManus drew attention to the strong performance against the 2025/26 College Development Plan, with 14,125 individual students engaging in College programmes against a target of 12,630. While recruitment to mainstream FE and HE programmes had been slightly below target, strong performance had been achieved across Skills for Life and Work, Traineeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Level Apprenticeships. He also highlighted strong recruitment to Level 3 FE provision and full-time HE.

The Committee was advised of progress in implementing the Traineeship and Essential Skills Action Plans and the anticipated improvement in Essential Skills success rates. Mr McManus also noted the increased participation through the Entitlement Framework.

5.2 Curriculum Development

Ref: Management Report Section 3

Mr McManus reported on the continued implementation of the Three-Year Curriculum Plan 2025–2028 and advised that curriculum planning remained underpinned by the tests of demand, capability and capacity, and viability. He commented on the efficiencies identified through the planning process and confirmed that strategically important provision had been protected.

The Committee noted the development of new Skills for Life and Work pathways in Media, Computing, Hair and Beauty and the progress being made on the revalidation and professional accreditation of Construction and Civil Engineering programmes.

Mr McManus also reported on the development of sustainable construction provision, including the Level 5 Passive House Designer programme and specialist learning materials in Heat Pump Technologies, Photovoltaic Systems and Electric Vehicle Charger Installation.

5.3 Quality Assurance

Ref: Management Report Section 4 and Paper 05.03

Mr McManus reported that the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan was rated Green across all RAG areas and outlined the increased use of in-year intelligence to support early intervention. The Committee also noted the award of four SWC HE Community Scholarships for 2026/27.

Mr McManus apprised members of the increase in examination entries, the challenges associated with Essential Skills and online examinations, and the achievement of full compliance across three JCQ inspections undertaken during summer 2026. He also referenced changes to awarding and examination arrangements for 2026/27. Mr McNamee advised that the Examinations Policy would include changes to the treatment of first resits, with a further update to be presented at the next meeting.

5.4 Student Experience

Ref: Management Report Section 5

Mr McManus reported high levels of learner satisfaction in the FE and WBL Pre-Exit Survey and the National Student Survey, including an overall satisfaction rate of 93% in the latter, although response rates remained below target. Members acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining responses from students who had left the College and agreed that the survey process would be reviewed.

Careers guidance had been identified as a quality enhancement priority for 2026/27. Members also noted the planned thematic reviews, refreshed induction programme for new lecturing staff and development of a new Learning, Teaching and Assessment Action Plan.

Mr McManus reported continued demand for counselling, examination access arrangements and Learning Support Workers and confirmed that no student had been refused admission due to the shortage. He also advised that a revised panel process had been introduced for applicants with extended support needs across both discrete SEN and mainstream provision. Members noted that two nominations had been received for the position of Student Governor and that an election would be conducted.

5.5 Safeguarding

Ref: Management Report Section 6 and Paper 05.04

Mr McManus referenced the annual Safeguarding Report and confirmed that safeguarding arrangements remained operational across all campuses. During 2025/26, 33 referrals had been received by Safeguarding Assistants, five of which required onward referral to Social Services, together with 28 Operation Encompass notifications.

In relation to student mental wellbeing, Mr McManus advised that mechanisms were in place to monitor engagement with counselling services and the number of students

seeking support.

Mr McNamee advised that further work was required to improve completion of safeguarding training by part-time and ancillary staff and confirmed that part-time staff would be paid for undertaking the training.

5.6 Resourcing Considerations

Ref: Management Report Section 7

Mr McManus reported that recruitment remained challenging in several high-demand areas, resulting in some cross-campus deployment, although recent recruitment activity had progressed positively. Curriculum Managers continued to work with Human Resources to address remaining teaching, assessment and Learning Support Worker requirements, while accommodation and equipment pressures were being managed through departmental risk registers. Members noted that some provision, including the Passive House Designer programme, was suitable for fully online delivery.

5.7 Business Development Activity

Ref: Management Report Section 8 and Paper 05.05

Mr McManus advised of reductions in the Skills Focus and InnovateUS funding allocations and noted that confirmation of Skill Up funding for 2026/27 remained outstanding. He reported that these reductions had been partly offset by funding secured through the Enhanced Investment Zone and Innovate UK, including funding for the Advance ME Further, Advance SME and Inclusive Edge initiatives.

The Committee noted progress across the GRASP, STRIDE, PRISM and SPARC programmes, including the expansion of green skills provision, the development of community-based digital solutions and ongoing work with businesses in the mineral processing sector. Mr McManus also referred to further funding applications being progressed to support community capacity, creative industries and regional economic development.

Members were advised that all scheduled Turing mobilities for 2025/26 had been completed. Mr McManus noted that the College's Turing application for 2026/27 had been unsuccessful and reported on preparations to access Erasmus+ funding from 2027/28.

5.8 Social Inclusion

Ref: Management Report Section 9 and Paper 05.06

Mr McManus reported continued growth across the College's Social Inclusion provision, with 231 young people enrolled on Skills for Life and Work and additional mentoring support available through Youthscape+. He noted that Youthscape+ had recruited 721 young people, with 526 completing the programme and a positive progression rate of 73%. Members also noted plans to establish a Youth Hub to support students at risk of disengagement.

Mr McManus commented on the reduced funding secured for REAP, the continued uncertainty regarding Going Places and the introduction of more flexible staffing arrangements across Social Inclusion programmes. He also referenced the further Labour Market Partnership funding secured for the Level 3 Classroom Assistant Academy.

5.9 Strategic Partnerships

Ref: Management Report Section 10

Mr McManus reported on progress in developing the Mid Ulster Lean Learning Factory and advised that funding of £727,000 had been confirmed for a two-year period, with the College acting as lead partner. He outlined the anticipated engagement with local companies and the proposed delivery of training and development interventions.

The Committee noted the potential for the Lean Learning Factory to support further digital and AI adoption activity and future Enhanced Investment Zone investment. Mr McManus advised that discussions were continuing regarding the proposed location and budget allocation.

Mr McManus also updated members on the Decarbonisation, Innovation and Skills for Concrete Centre and advised that, following the withdrawal of council support, the partnership was exploring Shared Island funding as an alternative means of progressing the project.

Ms McCartan advised that she had been appointed as Senior Responsible Owner for the Decarbonisation, Innovation & Skills for Concrete Centre project. The project had met the Department's criteria, would be added to its database and had received departmental recognition and support.

ACTION: Mrs Nugent to circulate the DfE letter confirming Ms McCartan's appointment as Senior Responsible Owner for the Decarbonisation, Innovation & Skills for Concrete Centre project.

5.10 Events, Public Relations & Marketing

Ref: Management Report Section 11 and Paper 05.07

Mr McManus apprised the Committee of the integrated marketing and communications activity delivered in support of student recruitment, including campaigns promoting FE and HE, part-time provision, registration days and clearing. He noted the increased reach and engagement achieved through the College's digital and social media channels, with Facebook remaining the strongest-performing platform. The Committee was also advised of plans to increase the use of real-time video content, supported by a register of participants.

Members commended the quality of the Marketing Report and the increased level of activity, suggesting that future reports include year-on-year trends. The Yearbook was also praised as an effective example of demonstrating impact rather than reporting statistics alone.

5.11 Policy Review

Ref: Management Report Section 12 and Papers 05.08 – 05.12

Mr McManus presented the updated Anti-Bullying Policy for Students, Artificial Intelligence Policy, Learner Work Placement Experience Policy, Student Attendance Policy and SWC Terms and Conditions 2027/28 for consideration.

The Chair highlighted the importance of making relevant policies accessible to students with additional learning needs, including through concise or pictorial versions where appropriate. Mr McNamee emphasised that inclusion should be considered throughout the entire student journey, from initial promotion and enrolment onwards, rather than viewed solely in the context of discrete SEN provision.

AGREED: the Committee recommended the following documents to the Governing Body for approval, subject to a review of the language and accessibility of relevant student-facing policies:

- **Anti-Bullying Policy for Students**
- **Artificial Intelligence Policy**
- **Learner Work Placement Experience Policy**
- **Student Attendance Policy**
- **SWC Terms and Conditions 2027/28.**

6.0 REVIEW OF CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Terms of Reference.

The Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference as part of the annual governance cycle with no suggested amendments.

AGREED: The Committee recommended the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference 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 Curriculum & Quality Assurance 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 MEETING

Members commented favourably on the proceedings of the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 6.35 pm.

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

GB CHAIRPERSON _____ DATE _____

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	30/09/2026	5.9	Mrs Nugent would circulate appointment letter from DfE to the Chief Executive regarding her appointment as SRO for the Decarbonisation, Innovation & Skills for Concrete Centre project.