

## SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**  
held on Wednesday 31 January 2024 at 5:30 pm  
in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus

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### **PRESENT:**

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

### **IN ATTENDANCE:**

Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body  
Mrs Sharon McGrath, Director of Corporate Services (*via Teams*)  
(*Item 6.0*)  
Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer

### **APOLOGIES:**

Mrs Deborah Brown  
Mr Diarmuid Hanna  
Ms Anne McCleary

## **1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES**

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting. He reflected on the Governing Body Strategy Meeting held on Wednesday 6 December 2023 and on the Department for the Economy's (DfE) objectives for the Further Education (FE) sector of increasing enrolments, reducing costs and enhancing quality. He also advised on the requirement for the Governing Body to undergo an external review of its effectiveness triennially and requested that comments are channelled through the Chairperson to enhance meeting effectiveness.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mrs Brown, Mr Hanna and Ms McCleary.

## **2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

### **3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM PREVIOUS GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 15 November 2023
- Paper 03.02 Minutes of a Governing Body Strategy Meeting held on Wednesday 6 December 2023.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell and seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, 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**

**Review of Further Education Delivery Model** – Dr O'Shiel advised of a forthcoming meeting with college Chairs and Chief Executives along with DfE officials on the Review of the FE Delivery Model. He explained that it is likely that workstreams will be developed and external experts engaged to progress and inform the review.

**Budget** – Dr O'Shiel commented on the imminent re-establishment of the NI Executive and Assembly and on the uncertainty to date in relation to the financial implications for the FE sector.

**College Employers' Forum (CEF)** – Dr O'Shiel reminded members of CEF's primary function to undertake negotiations on lecturers' pay and conditions of service with Trade Unions and of its constitution comprising the six NI FE colleges. He then explained that Belfast Metropolitan College (BMC) had recently sent notification of its withdrawal from CEF, putting it into abeyance, and advised of the subsequent engagements with BMC as well as of the consideration of the legitimacy of this position. In the context of the pending re-establishment of the NI Executive and Assembly, Ms McCartan informed the meeting that the absence of collective bargaining arrangements may disadvantage the sector in relation to funding bids to DfE to seek a resolution to the ongoing pay dispute.

**Media Coverage** – Dr O'Shiel apprised the meeting of anticipated local media coverage in relation to correspondence from a Trade Union official to the Vice Chair of CEF regarding his approach in chairing a recent CEF meeting. He noted the frequency of negative press coverage in relation to the College in a local newspaper and spoke of the need to consider options in relation to challenging such coverage.

**Member Suggestions** – Dr O'Shiel thanked Dr Campbell and Dr Cutting for their suggestions regarding the automation of data systems and the analysis of cost and capacity per curriculum area, and welcomed any further feedback or suggestions from members.

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 DfE Letter on 2024/25 10X Delivery Plan
- Paper 05.02 SWC Contribution to 10X Delivery Plan.

**2024/25 Recruitment** - Ms McCartan informed the meeting of the positive engagement with potential students at the Open Days held in the Dungannon and Enniskillen campuses as well as of the Open Day planned in the Omagh campus. She

expressed her appreciation to the managers and staff involved and advised of the non-participation of some staff due to escalated industrial action.

**2023/24 Performance** – Ms McCartan commented on her satisfaction with 2023/24 student enrolments and advised of the scope for a further increase in enrolments to part-time provision. She noted the challenge in maintaining enrolment numbers in the absence of social inclusion programmes and highlighted the impact of the popularity of Higher Level Apprenticeship (HLA) courses on enrolments to Full Time Higher Education (HE) programmes. She also reported good performance to date in relation to student retention and explained that success will be evaluated at a later point in the academic year. In response to a question from a member, Ms McCartan advised of the review underway to identify factors contributing to the College's relatively low reported Essential Skills success rates and of the interventions to enhance performance in this area.

**Curriculum Efficiencies** – Ms McCartan outlined the ongoing delivery efficiencies which have contributed to increasing average class sizes. She explained that these efficiencies have also resulted in reduced lecturer deployment in some areas which had been one consideration in informing the Reform to Save Scheme.

**Industrial Action** – Ms McCartan reported on the continuing strike action taken by University & College Union (UCU) members as well as on the escalation of action short of strike to include non-engagement with Open Days and withholding of student assessment results. She commented on the operational and reputational challenges presented by the industrial action as well as on its impact on the student experience and staff morale. She recognised the conflict felt by staff in relation to the industrial action and acknowledged the practical arrangements developed to mitigate impact but noted the continuation of the issues arising. Dr O'Shiel highlighted the desire of all parties to achieve a pay uplift for lecturers and reminded the meeting of the affordability impediment in achieving this outcome.

**Reform to Save / Voluntary Redundancy Scheme** – Ms McCartan updated the meeting on the progress of the Reform to Save / Voluntary Redundancy Scheme, advising that significant interest had been received by the deadline for applications earlier in the day and that further updates will be provided to the Staffing Committee in due course.

**Leadership & Development Programme** – Ms McCartan informed governors of the imminent commencement of an internal Leadership and Development Programme to build leadership capacity and empower leaders and aspiring leaders with the skills and knowledge to support the development of the College.

**Change Team** – Ms McCartan reported that a meeting of the Change Team had been held earlier in the month and advised of the aspiration to transition the focus of the team to culture and communications.

**College Development Plan 2023/24** – Ms McCartan confirmed the submission of the 2023/24 College Development Plan (CDP) to DfE and advised that a number of queries had been received requiring minor amendments to the CDP.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt, seconded by Dr Quinn, to delegate authority to the Chief Executive and the Chair of the Governing Body to review and approve any amendments to the CDP previously submitted to DfE.**

**DfE Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23** – Ms McCartan advised of the publication of the Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23 and undertook to provide a summary paper in due course.

**ACTION: Management to provide a summary paper on the Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23.**

**External Funding** – Ms McCartan reported on the additional income generated through successful applications for funding to the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, the Peace Plus Programme and the Heritage Lottery Fund as well as through a potential contract with the Republic of Ireland’s SOLAS agency to deliver apprenticeship training. In response to questions and comments from members, Ms McCartan provided further details of the financial value and operational arrangements of these alternate funding streams and noted the potential for resourcing implications in a number of areas.

**10X Delivery Plan** – Ms McCartan drew attention to the DfE letter on delivery of the 10X Economy Strategy and to the response detailing the College’s proposed contribution in achieving the objectives of the strategy over a three year period. She went on to speak of the disjointed nature of reporting in relation to aspects of the Skills for a 10X Economy objectives, the College Development Plan and the Quality Improvement Plan and commented on plans to enhance the alignment of such reporting.

## **6.0 DIGITAL STRATEGY**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Digital Strategy.

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

Mrs McGrath reminded the meeting of the issues raised by staff in previous years in relation to technology and reported on the significant progress made in addressing these concerns. She drew attention to the Digital Strategy presented and commented on the detailed development process therein.

With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, she then identified the core themes emerging from the relevant regional and national strategies; highlighted the vision, aims and principles of the Digital Strategy as well as the challenges considered; outlined the four themes within of Infrastructure & Cybersecurity, Systems & Data, Skills & Learning and Governance; referenced the action plan in place to deliver the aims of the strategy; and commented on the project governance including the establishment of a Digital Steering Committee and the Finance & General Purposes Committee’s oversight of the implementation of the strategy.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt, seconded by Dr Campbell, adoption of the Digital Strategy.**

***Mrs McGrath was thanked for her presentation and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.***

## **7.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 27 November 2023 Special Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements
- Paper 07.03 Letter of Representation
- Paper 07.04 Cover Letter to Report to Those Charged with Governance

- Paper 07.05 Report to Those Charged with Governance.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, reminded the meeting that a special meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee had been held on 27 November 2023 to review the 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements and receive the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance, and that the Annual Report & Financial Statements had subsequently been adopted by the Governing Body at its Strategy Meeting on 6 December 2023 on the recommendation of the Committee.

Ms McCartan explained that a technical issue on the accounting of the College's two Private Finance Initiative (PFI) projects had been raised by the NI Audit Office (NIAO) subsequent to the Governing Body's approval of the Annual Report & Financial Statements resulting in a delay in the issue of the Report to Those Charged with Governance. She highlighted the priority 2 recommendation in relation to this finding and noted that a solution will be agreed with the NIAO in advance of the audit of the 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, 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.**

## 8.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 29 November 2023 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Carers' Policy
- Paper 08.03 Access NI Policy Statement
- Paper 08.04 Discussion Paper on Awarding Incremental Credit for Academic Staff.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on 29 November 2023, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, highlighted the Committee's suggestion that preparatory work is undertaken to progress an external review of the change process; advised of its adoption of an internal trawl approach to recruitment in the first instance in order to safeguard jobs in the context of the forthcoming voluntary redundancies through the Reform to Save Scheme; and drew attention to its recommendation for approval of the Carers' Policy, the Access NI Policy Statement and the proposal to award incremental credit for academic staff to support staff recruitment and retention as outlined in paper 08.04. She also noted a member's subsequent query on the Access NI Policy Statement and suggested that its approval is deferred pending further review.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell, seconded by Mr Ingram, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and approval of the Carers' Policy and the proposal to award incremental credit to academic staff. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.**

## 9.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 10 January 2024 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Financial Management Report to 31 October 2023
- Paper 09.03 Energy Management Policy
- Paper 09.04 Bad Debt Policy.

With reference to paper 09.01, Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 10 January 2024 by informing members of the alleviation of budget pressures for 2023/24 due to the implementation of efficiency measures and the receipt of additional income, and by noting the balance to be achieved between cost savings and effective service delivery. He went on to highlight the concerns raised regarding the 2024/25 budget due to the significant value of non-baselined items and noted the unsatisfactory nature of the methodology used in the allocation of budgets to colleges.

He then referenced the update received on sustainability, noting in particular the forthcoming legislative requirement to report on carbon emissions, and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Energy Management Policy and the Bad Debt Policy, pointing out the change in the value of individual bad debt authorised by the Chief Executive for write off from £2,500 to £7,000.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Brunt, adoption of the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.**

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of 17 January 2024 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 10.02 2023/24 College Development Plan
- Paper 10.03 Interim Whole College Self-Evaluation & Quality Improvement Impact Report
- Paper 10.04 Fitness to Practice Policy
- Paper 10.05 Submission of Coursework Policy
- Paper 10.06 FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy
- Paper 10.07 Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy.

In presenting the minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 17 January 2024, Dr Quinn, Committee Chair, referenced the discussions held on the Committee's key strategic issues highlighting the planned review of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision, the interventions put in place to address barriers to success in relation to Essential Skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), the good feedback received in relation to the student experience, and the focus placed on DfE's objectives of increased enrolments, reduced costs and enhanced quality.

She then provided an overview of the Management Report received by the Committee noting the curriculum efficiencies achieved, the need for improvements in data and reporting management, the coaching training to be provided to Curriculum Managers, the College's successful bid for funding under the Peace Plus Programme, the presentation provided on the Interim College Self-Evaluation Report and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Fitness to Practice Policy, the Submission of Coursework Policy, the FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy and the Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy.

Dr Quinn also referenced the presentation received on Higher Level Apprenticeships.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Quinn, seconded by Mrs Brunt, 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.

**11.0 PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Cover Letter to Partnership Agreement
- Paper 11.02 Partnership Agreement.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, seconded by Mr Barnett, endorsement of the Partnership Agreement between the Department for the Economy and South West College.**

**12.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12 List of Outstanding Actions.

Following a review of the outstanding actions listed in paper 12, it was noted that all actions had been addressed. A revised list of outstanding actions is included in Appendix A.

**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**

Dr O'Shiel welcomed feedback on the effectiveness of meetings and the conduct of Governing Body business.

***Mr Corr 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 10 APRIL 2024**

CHAIRPERSON 

DATE 11/04/2024

## SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Minute Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	31/01/2024	5.0	Management to provide a summary paper on the Statistical Bulletin on FE Sector Activity in NI 2018/19 – 2022/23.