

## SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**  
held on Wednesday 4 February 2026 at 5:30 pm  
in the Boardroom, Erne Campus

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- PRESENT:**
- Mrs Libby Armstrong
  - Mr Michael Barnett
  - Mrs Maureen Brunt
  - Mr Tom Corr
  - Dr David Cutting (*via MS Teams*)
  - Mrs Maria Hackett (*via MS Teams*)
  - Mr Brian Ingram (*from item 4.0*)
  - Mrs Sandra Isherwood
  - Mr Ryan Kearney (*from item 5.0*)
  - Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive
  - Ms Anne McCleary (*via MS Teams*)
  - Mrs Gillian McDowell (*via MS Teams*)
  - Dr Nichola Melanaphy
  - Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair
  - Dr Lynsey Quinn
- IN ATTENDANCE:**
- Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
  - Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer
- APOLOGIES:**
- Dr Frances Campbell

### **1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES**

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present.

An apology was tendered on behalf of Dr Campbell and it was noted that Mr Ingram and Mr Kearney would join the meeting at a later juncture.

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

Dr Quinn declared her employment with the Open University.

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 19 November 2025
- Paper 04.02 Minutes of a Governing Body Strategy Meeting held on Thursday 11 December 2025.

With reference to the minutes of the Governing Body Strategy meeting, Dr Quinn commended the achievement of a balanced budget for 2025/26 and congratulated those involved in the delivery of the Higher Education graduation ceremonies.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Brunt and seconded by Mr Corr, 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                      DfE Letter on Change to Colleges' Financial Year.

**Change to Colleges' Financial Year** – Dr O'Shiel apprised the meeting of the forthcoming change to colleges' year end to align it with that of the Department for the Economy (DfE) and referenced the associated communication in paper 04.01.

**NI Government Budget** – Dr O'Shiel spoke of the expectation of challenging NI government budgets in the medium term and of the impacts on sectoral budgets. He commented on the College's strong position in meeting the expected challenges and advised of continuous sectoral engagements including a forthcoming briefing to governing bodies by DfE's Permanent Secretary.

***Mr Ingram joined the meeting at this juncture.***

**FE Reform** – Dr O'Shiel, supported by Ms McCartan, updated the meeting on developments in relation to the FE Reform Project including resourcing, timeframe, required sectoral commitments and expected outputs.

**Decisions Taken Under Chair's Authority** – Dr O'Shiel reported his approval of the following:

- the Asset Management Policy to reflect changes to depreciation policy as recommended by the NI Audit Office (NIAO);
- the Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy to incorporate amendments requested by DfE; and
- the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements, on the recommendation of the Audit & Risk Committee, to progress their finalisation and laying before the NI Assembly.

**Governor Vacancies** – Dr O'Shiel confirmed the re-appointment of Mrs Isherwood, Ms McCleary and Dr Quinn to the Governing Body for a second term; advised that expressions of interest had been sought from Mrs Brunt, Dr Campbell and Mr Ingram in a second term of appointment; and reported that no response had been received to his letter to DfE seeking an early commencement to the recruitment exercise to fill the two vacancies in the Governing Body.

**Accountability Meeting with DfE** – Dr O'Shiel apprised members of the date of the forthcoming Accountability Meeting with DfE.

**Autism Awareness Training** – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of forthcoming Autism Awareness Training in support of the College's application for the Autism Impact Award.

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

**Students** – Ms McCartan reported on Apprenticeship Week activities including internal SkillBuild competitions; spoke of the interest in 2026/27 programmes evidenced through successful Open Days in the Dungannon, Erne and Omagh campuses; commented on the value of the redistribution of hardship funds to support all students through a Winter Warmers Scheme; and advised of the factors to be considered in potential weather related closures and, at the suggestion of a member, undertook to reflect on the merits of a procedure to support decision making in this regard.

*Mr Kearney joined the meeting at this juncture.*

**Education & Training Inspectorate (ETI) Activity** – Ms McCartan made the Governing Body aware of the ongoing consultation on the future Further Education (FE) inspection model; advised of the commencement of an inspection of Skills for Life & Work provision; and undertook to circulate the written feedback received on the evaluation of the College’s discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities (SLDD).

**ACTION: Written feedback on the ETI evaluation of the College’s discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to be circulated to members.**

**Social Inclusion Programmes** – Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of the potential impacts of significant budget reductions for projects funded under the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund.

**Industry Support Strategic Projects** - Ms McCartan reported on the progress made in the Mid Ulster Productivity Centre project, aimed at the Advanced Manufacturing and Engineering sector, as well as that made in the Decarbonisation and Industry Support Centre project, aimed at the concrete sector, and sought the delegation of authority to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Projects Oversight Committee and the Chief Executive to review and approve the submission of an Outline Business Case for funding for the latter. At the request of a member, Ms McCartan also undertook to arrange a site visit to the College’s Welding Academy.

**AGREED: that authority is delegated to the Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Projects Oversight Committee and the Chief Executive to review and approve the submission of an Outline Business Case for funding for the Decarbonisation and Industry Support Centre Project.**

**ACTION: Governor site visit to the College’s Welding Academy to be arranged.**

**SEN-SE Strategic Project** – Ms McCartan reported on the outputs of and ongoing developments in the Special Educational Needs & Student Engagement (SEN-SE) project. She referenced the presentation received at the December 2025 Governing Body Strategy Meeting on the Future Design concept and advised of the proposal to establish a Task & Finish Group for the Future Design of an Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Enabled College. She undertook to circulate the draft Terms of Reference for this group and seek expressions of interest in its membership from governors.

**ACTION: Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group for the Future Design of an Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Enabled College to be circulated and expressions of interest in membership sought.**

## **6.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01                      Minutes of 3 December 2025 Staffing Committee Meeting
- Paper 06.02                      Recruitment & Selection Policy.

With reference to the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 3 December 2025, Mrs Armstrong, Committee Chair, highlighted the update received on the Committee’s key strategic issues, the broadly positive responses within the latest staff pulse survey, the withdrawal of a sickness absence target in favour of sectoral benchmarking, the relatively low number of accidents and the Committee’s recommendation for approval of the Recruitment & Selection Policy.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Armstrong, seconded by Mr Ingram, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendation within. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.**

## **7.0 STUDENT GOVERNOR REPORT**

Mr Kearney reported on engagements held with staff and students since the November 2025 Governing Body meeting. He outlined the issues raised by students as well as the mitigating actions taken and planned. He also welcomed the introduction of the Winter Warmers Scheme, spoke of the success of the Open Days and advised of planned workshops and initiatives.

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 14 January 2026 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 2024-27 Quality Improvement Plan Progress Report
- Paper 07.03 Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy
- Paper 07.04 Learning Resource Centre Policy
- Paper 07.05 Personal Mobile Device Guidance
- Paper 07.06 Higher Education Admissions & Admissions Appeals Policy
- Paper 07.07 Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy 2025-2028
- Paper 07.08 Artificial Intelligence Policy
- Paper 07.09 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy.

Reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 14 January 2026, Mrs Isherwood, Committee Chair, began by providing an overview of the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues, noting in particular the communications and resourcing challenges faced in relation to Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision as well as the positive feedback received following the ETI evaluation of the College's discrete provision for SLDD.

She went on to reference the Management Report received by the Committee, highlighting the reported improvements in Essential Skills success rates, the alignment of the draft 2025-28 Curriculum Strategy with the College's Strategic Plan, Curriculum Vision and Quality Improvement Plan, and the Committee's endorsement of the revised 2024-2027 Quality Improvement Plan as well as of its endorsement of identified priority areas for recruitment. She also drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy, the Learning Resource Centre Policy, the Personal Mobile Device Guidance, the Higher Education Admissions & Admissions Appeals Policy, the Learning, Teaching & Assessment Strategy 2025-2028, the Artificial Intelligence Policy and the Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy.

In response to a question from a member, Ms McCartan explained that ETI evaluations of discrete provision for SLDD had been undertaken in all six colleges and that a sectoral evaluation report and associated recommendations are expected. She went on to comment on the resourcing impact of the growing demand for discrete SEN provision as well as increasing support needs amongst students in mainstream courses.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Isherwood, 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.**

## 9.0 FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 21 January 2026 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 Revised 2025/26 Budget Allocation
- Paper 08.03 Financial Management Report to 30 November 2025
- Paper 08.04 Fees & Charges Policy 2026/27.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 21 January 2026 by referencing the pending change to colleges' year end and noting the associated benefits and drawbacks of this arrangement.

He went on to report on the forecast balanced out-turn in the budget to 31 March 2026; confirm the finalisation of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements; welcome the appointment of additional resource in the finance team; reference the comprehensive 2024/25 sustainability report received; note the downward trend in energy consumption; and highlight the Committee's recommendation for approval of the 2026/27 Fees & Charges Policy.

In response to questions and comments from members, Ms McCartan explained that additional funding had been received from DfE following a departmental monitoring review in the absence of a NI Executive Monitoring Round and agreed that the College's contribution to the progress made in delivering the Economic Vision is communicated to the Permanent Secretary.

**ACTION: Circulate DfE's progress report on delivering the Economic Vision.**

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Barnett, seconded by Mrs Isherwood, 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.**

## 10.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of 26 January 2026 Special Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Draft 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements
- Paper 09.03 Draft 2024/25 Report to Those Charged with Governance.

Reporting on the special meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on 26 January 2026, Mr Ingram, Committee Chair, confirmed the Committee's review of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements and the 2024/25 Report to Those Charged with Governance. He advised of the implementation of the two recommendations made, highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements, and noted the Chair of the Governing Body's approval thereof as reported earlier in the meeting.

Members commented on the importance of robust financial governance and welcomed the unqualified audit opinion received in relation to the 2024/25 Annual Report & Financial Statements.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Mr Corr, 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.**

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

No declarations were made under this heading.

**12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

No further business was raised.

**13.0 OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12 List of Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that all actions listed had been addressed.

A revised list of outstanding actions is included as Appendix A.

**14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING**

Members conveyed their satisfaction with the proceedings of the meeting.

*The meeting concluded at 7:00 pm.*

**CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 APRIL 2026**

**GB CHAIRPERSON**



**DATE**

15/04/2026

## SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	<b>Meeting Date</b>	<b>Minute Ref</b>	<b>Action</b>
1	04/02/2026	5.0	Written feedback on the ETI evaluation of the College's discrete provision for students with learning difficulties and disabilities to be circulated to members.
2	04/02/2026	5.0	Governor site visit to the College's Welding Academy to be arranged.
3	04/02/2026	5.0	Terms of Reference for the Task & Finish Group for the Future Design of an Inclusive Artificial Intelligence Enabled College to be circulated and expressions of interest in membership sought.
4	04/02/2026	9.0	Circulate DfE's progress report on delivering the Economic Vision.