

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

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

PRESENT:	Mrs Libby Armstrong Mr Michael Barnett Mrs Maureen Brunt Dr Frances Campbell Mr Tom Corr (<i>from item 5.0</i>) Mrs Maria Curran (<i>via MS Teams</i>) Mrs Maria Hackett Mr Brian Ingram Mrs Sandra Isherwood Ms Alana Jones Campbell Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive Mrs Gillian McDowell Dr Nichola Melanaphy (<i>via MS Teams</i>) Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chair Dr Lynsey Quinn (<i>via MS Teams</i>)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body Ms Martina McKeivitt, Innovation & Consultancy Services Mrs Nicola Nugent, Executive Support Officer Mr Aidan Toal, Innovation & Consultancy Services
APOLOGIES:	Dr David Cutting Mr Diarmuid Hanna Ms Anne McCleary

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel opened the meeting by welcoming all present, extending a particular welcome to Ms McKeivitt and Mr Toal, Innovation & Consultancy Services (ICS), in attendance in an observational capacity as part of the review of the effectiveness of the Governing Body. Mr Toal provided an update on the progress of the review and thanked members for their input into the recently closed Governor Survey.

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

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Mrs Curran declared her employment with Manufacturing & Engineering Growth & Advancement (MEGA) in the context of potential updates on business engagement. At a later stage in the meeting Mrs Brunt declared her position as an Equality Commissioner.

3.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM THE GOVERNING BODY MEETINGS HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER 2024 AND 11 DECEMBER 2024

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Minutes of 20 November 2024 Governing Body Meeting
- Paper 03.02 Minutes of 11 December 2024 Governing Body Meeting.

There were no matters arising from the minutes.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Jones Campbell and seconded by Dr 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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy
- Paper 04.02 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements.

Priorities – Dr O'Shiel reminded the meeting of the College's commitment to the Department for the Economy's (DfE) objectives for the Further Education (FE) sector of increasing student numbers, reducing costs and enhancing quality and reflected, in turn, on the progress made by South West College (SWC) in all three objectives.

Sectoral Collaboration – Dr O'Shiel reported on Belfast Metropolitan College's re-entry to the Colleges' Employers Forum (CEF).

Review of the FE Delivery Model / FE Transformation – Dr O'Shiel advised of DfE's continued commitment to its published Economic Vision under the new Economy Minister as well as of the alignment of the current FE delivery model with the Regionalisation priority within.

Approval Under Delegated Authority – It was noted that the following decisions had been taken by the Chair of the Governing Body under his authority to do so between meetings:

- Approval of the Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy in consultation with the Chair of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee;
- Approval of the 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements in consultation with the Vice Chair of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and the Chief Executive;
- Appointment of Dr Melanaphy to the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee; and
- Approval of the staff requests and fixed term contract proposals recommended by the Staffing Committee.

Mr Corr joined the meeting at this juncture.

5.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Chief Executive's Update
- Paper 05.01 FE Sector Activity in NI 2019/20 – 2023/24
- Paper 05.02 FE Sector Activity in NI 2023/24

- Paper 05.03 SWC v Sector Activity 2018/19 – 2023/24.

5.1 Performance

Ms McCartan referenced the recent publication of the Report on FE Sector Activity in NI 2019/20 – 2023/24 and went on to present key trends for SWC in terms of enrolments, student numbers, achievement rates, mode of attendance and subject areas. She highlighted the College's high market share in relation to student numbers and enrolments following an increase in its student population in 2023/24 as well as an overall sectoral decrease in the same period.

Ms McCartan also reported the College's adherence to its budget to 31 March 2025, alerted the meeting to expectations of a challenging 2025/26 budget allocation, advised of good footfall at recent Open Days and apprised members of the updates provided to college representatives at a recent DfE Partnership Engagement event in relation to budgets, business planning and decarbonisation.

In response to questions and comments from members, she commented on the discussions held with DfE on the drawbacks of the current funding model, acknowledged the College's good position in relation to efficiency metrics and explained the reasons for its behind sector average position in terms of both success rates and number of students aged over 25, listing the interventions in place enhance performance in these areas.

5.2 Quality

Ms McCartan apprised the meeting of the Education & Training Inspectorate's (ETI) new inspection framework and of the positive verbal feedback received following a recent inspection of Traineeships. She presented the six strategic objectives within the proposed 2024-27 Quality Improvement Plan and provided an overview of the trends in responses to staff pulse surveys undertaken to date in 2024/25 as part of the Employee Engagement Plan.

In response to questions and comments from members, Ms McCartan provided further details of the Staff Pulse Surveys and Employee Engagement Surveys, noted the lack of sectoral benchmarking data due to the absence of similar staff surveys and undertook to circulate invitations to governors to upcoming events to raise the profile of the Governing Body amongst staff.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to circulate details of forthcoming events to governors.

5.3 Strategic Projects

Reflecting on the presentation received at the November 2024 Governing Body meeting, Ms McCartan reported on the forthcoming commencement of the Smart Rural Innovation Driven Empowerment (STRIDE) project and the Green Accelerator Skills Project (GRASP) funded under the Peace Plus Programme. She also updated the meeting on the development of proposals for projects focusing on Advanced Manufacturing & Engineering and Sustainability within the Construction Industry as well as on the development of an internal Special Education Needs & Student Experience (SENSE) project.

She commented on the complexity of such projects and, at the suggestion of a member, undertook to consider governance arrangements to provide appropriate Governing Body oversight.

ACTION: Ms McCartan to consider governance arrangements of strategic projects.

5.4 **Strategic Plan Development**

Ms McCartan reminded the meeting of the agreed strategic priorities of Learner Experience, Partnership & Collaboration, Sustainability and Governance & Culture and provided an update on the development of a three year Strategic Plan based on these priorities. It was agreed that Governing Body committees consider the four agreed priorities and associated objectives in the context of their remit for input into the strategic plan.

ACTION: Committees to consider the four agreed priorities and associated objectives in the context of their remit for input into the strategic plan.

Mrs Curran withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

6.0 **STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Minutes of 3 December 2024 Staffing Committee Meeting.

Drawing attention to the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting held on 3 December 2024, Ms Jones Campbell, Committee Chair, referenced the results of the Staff Pulse Survey discussed earlier in the meeting, noted the positive feedback received from the Equality Commission on the College's 2023/24 Section 75 Annual Progress Report and highlighted the Committee's concerns regarding the relatively low level of staff compliance with completion of corporate training modules and advised of the target set to enhance the completion rate.

In response to a query from a member, Ms McCartan confirmed that Health & Safety training is provided to subcontracted staff of the PFI supplier based on college campuses.

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.

7.0 **AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of 16 December 2024 Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
- Paper 07.02 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements
- Paper 07.03 2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, explained that a special meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee had been convened on 16 December 2024 to review the draft 2023/24 Annual Report & Financial Statements and draft 2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance. He commented on the Committee's concern regarding the impact of the late identification of a number of sectoral technical issues requiring adjustments and on its request for clarity on the accounting treatments to be applied in advance of the preparation of the 2024/25 Financial Statements. He explained that the final 2023/24 Report to Those Charged with Governance had been received in late January 2025 and invited Ms McCartan to comment further.

With reference to paper 07.03, Ms McCartan explained that no issues had been identified in relation to the two significant risks set out in the Audit Strategy, drew attention to the three recommendations made within the Report to Those Charged with

Governance, commented on the impact of the resultant write off of the pension surplus and spoke of her dissatisfaction with the lack of clarity on the accounting treatment to be used in relation to pensions and PFI contracts. She also advised of a letter received from DfE on colleges' role in meeting deadlines set for the audit of DfE's Group Annual Report and Accounts.

Dr O'Shiel informed the Governing Body of the forthcoming Accountability meeting with DfE and of Mr Ingram's participation in this meeting in his position of Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee.

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.

8.0 CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of 15 January 2025 Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Meeting
- Paper 08.02 SENSE Project Terms of Reference
- Paper 08.03 2024-27 Quality Improvement Plan
- Paper 08.04 2024/25 CDP Progress Report
- Paper 08.05 2024-29 Marketing Strategy
- Paper 08.06 FE Personal Tutoring and Academic Support Policy.

Reporting on the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on 15 January 2025, Mrs Isherwood, Committee Chair, highlighted the updates received in relation to curriculum developments, College Development Plan performance, special educational needs provision, the student experience and quality assurance. She also referenced the presentations received on the proposed 2024-29 Quality Improvement Plan and the Curriculum Dashboard and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for progression of the SENSE Project and approval of the 2024-27 Quality Improvement Plan, the 2024-29 Marketing Strategy, the FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy.

The meeting noted the importance of staff completion of the Safeguarding corporate training module, was reminded of the forthcoming training session on safeguarding for governors and was made aware of the governance framework in place in relation to safeguarding.

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 09.01 Minutes of 22 January 2025 Finance & General Purposes Committee Meeting
- Paper 09.02 Financial Management Report to 31 December 2024
- Paper 09.03 2025/26 Fees & Charges Policy
- Paper 09.04 CCTV Policy.

Mr Barnett, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, began his report of the committee meeting held on 22 January 2025 by providing an overview of the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues noting in particular the contribution made by externally funded projects to the College's overhead costs, the likelihood of a challenging budget position for 2025/26, DfE's encouragement of greater sectoral collaboration and the College's well placed position in contributing to DfE's decarbonisation commitments.

He went on to report on the updates provided through the Management Report highlighting the College's adherence to its budget to 31 March 2025 and its recommendation for approval of the CCTV Policy and the 2025/26 Fees & Charges Policy.

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 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

11.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Drawing the non-confidential section of the meeting to a close, Dr O'Shiel reminded governors that all business is covered in non-confidential session where possible and that matters are dealt with in confidential session by exception. Dr O'Shiel also commented on the key role of the Secretary to the Governing Body.

12.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commented on the open and constructive nature of the meeting.

Mr Corr, Ms McKeivitt, Dr Melanaphy and Mr Toal 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
2 APRIL 2025**

CHAIRPERSON



DATE 02/04/2025

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	05/02/2025	5.2	Ms McCartan to circulate details of forthcoming events to governors.
2	05/02/2025	5.3	Ms McCartan to consider governance arrangements of strategic projects.
3	05/02/2025	5.4	Committees to consider the four agreed priorities and associated objectives in the context of their remit for input into the strategic plan.