

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a strategy meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 6 December 2023 at 9:45 am
in the Workhouse, Erne Campus

- PRESENT:**
- Mrs Libby Armstrong
 - Mr Michael Barnett
 - Mrs Deborah Brown
 - Mrs Maureen Brunt
 - Dr Frances Campbell
 - Mr Tom Corr
 - Dr David Cutting
 - Mr Diarmuid Hanna (*from item 5.0*)
 - Ms Alana Jones Campbell
 - Mr Brian Ingram
 - Mrs Sandra Isherwood
 - Ms Celine McCartan, Principal & Chief Executive (*via MS Teams from item 6.0*)
 - Ms Anne McCleary
 - Mrs Gillian McDowell
 - Dr Nicholas O'Shiel, Chairman
 - Dr Lynsey Quinn
- IN ATTENDANCE:**
- Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
 - Mrs Sharon McGrath, Director of Corporate Services
 - Mr Patrick McKeown, Finance Director, North West Regional College (*Item 6.0 via MS Teams*)
 - Mr Ciaran McManus, Director of Development & Support
 - Mr Pdraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
 - Mr Sean O'Donnell, Head of Finance & Governance (*Items 6.0 & 7.0 via MS Teams*)
 - Dr Lorna Warren, Quality Improvement Advisor, DfE (*Item 5.0 only via MS Teams*)
- APOLOGIES:**
- Mrs Maria Curran
 - Mrs Maria Hackett

1.0 PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to Mr Corr, recently appointed staff governor, on his first attendance at a Governing Body meeting.

He explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the Department for the Economy's (DfE's) objectives for the sector of increasing student numbers, reducing costs and enhancing quality in the context of the College's vision, mission and values. He commented on the sectoral budget pressures, the efficiencies made in South West College and the need for sectoral equity in relation to cost ratios in advance of apportioning any cuts to be applied.

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mrs Curran and Mrs Hackett.

2.0 **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 **CONTEXT**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03.01 Draft 2023/24 College Development Plan and Educational Report Card
- Paper 03.01a 2023/24 College Development Plan Summary
- Paper 03.02 Report on Progress of Implementation of Strategic Improvement Plan
- Paper 03.03 Updated Six Year Performance Data Analysis and Trends
- Paper 03.04 Five Year Financial Analysis.

Ms McCartan began by welcoming members to the Enniskillen Workhouse building and reflecting on the last Governing Body workshop held in March 2023 to develop the College's vision, mission and values.

She then referenced the report provided on the progress of the implementation of the Strategic Improvement Plan noting that 25 of the 40 actions have been implemented, 14 are in progress and one is behind target. She reminded members of the alignment of the actions with the recommendations made in the reports commissioned by the external Change Team and commented on the ongoing efforts required to address cultural issues, particularly in light of the ongoing lecturers' pay dispute.

With reference to the reports provided on the College's six year performance data and trends and the five year financial analysis, Ms McCartan highlighted the overall reduced delivery since its peak in 2018/19, albeit with an upward trend since 2022/23, as well as the increased costs. She commented on the demographic factors, the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the policy issues contributing to the reduced activity and increased costs. She also outlined the College's good performance in relation to responding to skills needs, the behind sector-average success rate, the need for progression pathways in all curricular areas, the provision of social inclusion programmes, the staff complement and costs and the projected saving of £1.1m per annum through the exit of up to 37 staff under the Reform to Save Scheme.

Ms McCartan detailed the timeframe for submission of the 2023/24 College Development Plan (CDP) and Educational Report Card to DfE and drew attention to the information provided within the draft CDP on the profile, performance and challenges faced by the College as well as the planned activity in alignment with the three pillars of the 10X Economy Strategy of Innovation, Inclusive Growth and Sustainability.

AGREED: on the proposal of Dr Quinn, seconded by Mr Ingram, approval in principle of the draft 2023/24 College Development Plan and Educational Report Card.

Dr O'Shiel commented on the Governing Body's desire to provide a pay award to lecturing staff and on the impediment of the current public sector financial challenges. He provided assurances on the commitment of the College Employers' Forum to continue to strive for a solution to the pay award issue.

4.0 **INCREASING STUDENT DELIVERY**

Mr McNamee led a workshop with governors to identify barriers to student engagement as well as potential solutions.

5.0 ENHANCING QUALITY

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05 Quality.

Dr Lorna Warren joined the meeting at this juncture.

Dr Warren began by introducing herself, her background and her role within DfE. With the aid of a PowerPoint presentation, she then proceeded to inform governors of the key considerations in the quality agenda as set out in paper 05.

On conclusion of her presentation Dr Warren was thanked for her input and withdrew from the meeting.

Dr Warren withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

Mr Hanna joined the meeting at this juncture.

During the discussion which followed Dr Warren's report, the link between quality, culture and values was highlighted as was the importance of the student voice; the whole college self-evaluation cycle was outlined; management undertook to circulate the eight quality improvement actions in the 2022-24 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan; members welcomed transparent assessments of quality matters; and the validity of the current method of measuring success was queried. It was also noted that success alone should not be used to assess the value of courses due to the College's responsibility for enhancing social inclusion.

ACTION: circulate the eight quality improvement actions in the 2022-24 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan.

6.0 COST EFFICIENCIES

Mr Patrick McKeown and Mr Sean O'Donnell joined the meeting at this juncture.

Mr McKeown began by referencing the sectoral benchmarking exercise of 2021/22 data undertaken by Tribal noting that data from the six colleges had been gathered as well as comparative data from a high performing English college. He proceeded to present an analysis of this of this data as prepared for the Strategic Alliance between Northern Regional College, North West Regional College and South West College.

A discussion ensued during which members were made aware of the projected sectoral 2024/25 funding gap of £35m and the unlikelihood of achieving savings of this magnitude without large scale cuts to provision; were advised of the scope within the Reform to Save business case to facilitate an extension into 2024/25 should funding become available; were informed of the options appraisal in relation to the future governance arrangements of the Strategic Alliance Group; were reminded of the objectives of increasing student numbers, reducing costs and enhancing quality; and highlighted the balance to be achieved between the delivery of cost efficiencies and the provision of services to meet local needs in any future further education (FE) delivery model.

Dr O'Shiel then spoke of the value of the analysis provided by Mr McKeown and thanked him for his contributions.

Mr McKeown withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

In response to questions and comments from members, management undertook to provide a breakdown of costs by curriculum area; commented on the need for a

review of the funding model to reflect performance; highlighted the sectoral differences in the cost of non-teaching staff and the negative impact of this on South West College; and outlined the inability to compare teaching costs in NI and English colleges due to the significant differences in teaching models and contracts.

ACTION: management to provide a breakdown of costs by curriculum area.

Dr O'Shiel concluded the discussion by reflecting on the efficiencies achieved by South West College and the need for equity in efficiency levels across the sector and by highlighting the Governing Body's objective of increasing student numbers, managing costs and enhancing quality.

7.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements
- Paper 07.02 Report To Those Charged With Governance
- Paper 07.03 Risk Appetite Statement.

Mr Ingram, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, explained that a special meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee had been held to review the 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements and receive the draft Report to Those Charged with Governance. He welcomed the unqualified audit opinion proposed by the NI Audit Office (NIAO) and highlighted the Committee's recommendation for approval of the 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements and the Risk Appetite Statement.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Ingram, seconded by Ms Jones Campbell, approval of the 2022/23 Annual Report & Financial Statements and adoption of the Risk Appetite Statement.

Mr O'Donnell withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

8.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy.

With reference to paper 08, Mr McNamee explained the sectoral nature of the Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy and sought its adoption by the Governing Body.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Corr, seconded by Mrs McDowell, adoption of the Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy.

Mrs Brown, Mr Corr and Mr Hanna 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 31 JANUARY 2024

CHAIRMAN



DATE 31/01/2024

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	06/12/2023	5.0	Circulate the eight quality improvement actions in the 2022-24 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan.
2	06/12/2023	6.0	Management to provide a breakdown of costs by curriculum area.