

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of an online meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 24 June 2020

PRESENT:

- Mr Peter Archdale
- Ms Siobhan Breen
- Mr Zack El Marif
- Mrs Joanne Lucas
- Mrs Margaret Martin
- Mr Michael McAlister (Chief Executive)
- Mrs Patricia McCaffrey
- Mr Seamus McCaffrey
- Mrs Gillian McDowell
- Mrs Monica McGeary
- Mr Michael McGuckin
- Mrs Joanne Moore
- Mr Gerard O'Hanlon
- Dr Nicholas O'Shiel (Chair)
- Mr Michael Skuce

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive
- Mrs Breidge Morrison, PA to the Chief Executive
- Ms Claire O'Donnell, Secretary to the Governing Body
- Mr Sean O'Donnell, Head of Finance (*Item 15.0 only*)

9.0 APOLOGIES

None.

10.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No declarations were made under this heading.

11.0 MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11 Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body held on 29 April 2020

AGREED: that the above minutes be adopted as a true and accurate record and it was noted that there were no matters arising. These minutes were not signed as the meeting was conducted online.

Mr Archdale suggested that it would be useful to capture cost variations for onsite and online teaching. In response the Chief Executive advised that additional funding had been requested through the Department for hardware to support students. He also explained that the Department was issuing a survey to flag the learnings from the

lockdown, including the difficulties and problems. Mr Archdale added that little research had been done into the effectiveness of online learning and suggested that funding towards this would be welcomed.

In response to queries from Mrs McCaffrey, the Chief Executive explained that the College had taken feedback from students at an early stage to ascertain IT requirements. He advised that requirements were different across the sector and that some gaps still remained.

Mr McGuckin then queried what additional support was being provided to staff working from home. The Chief Executive advised that this was being considered by the people working group. Mrs McDowell further queried if Microsoft Teams training had been provided to staff. In response the Chief Executive advised that Microsoft Teams had been rolled out before lockdown, but added that a wide range of training (including Teams training) had been rolled out in a very short space of time around lockdown.

12.0 CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

The Chairman advised that the main purpose of the meeting would be to allow the Chief Executive to update on Phase 2 Recovery Planning. He added that he wanted to touch on two strategic items in the first instance, being sustainability and marketing. He invited Mr Archdale to update members on these issues with support from Dr Cush.

Mr Archdale advised that a very positive meeting of the main strategic group had taken place the previous day. The outline of the strategy had been agreed which was to take the international, national and regional obligations, to act as a framework within which the College must operate. A key way of doing this would be some of the work Professor Alan Strong was doing around the Smart Region and One Planet Living he advised. Mr Archdale advised that the plan could be developed once the strategy had been drawn up. The key issue would be information flow, which was very close to communications and marketing. In this respect it was agreed that communication and marketing staff needed to be included in the work of the group moving forward.

Dr Cush added that partnerships locally and nationally would also be important. She explained that there was an aspiration to use College expertise in sustainability. The student voice would also be very important and Dr Cush spoke about different ways this could be brought in. Finally, Dr Cush advised that it was agreed that an initial draft strategy would be developed for September 2020. This draft would be very short and succinct she advised but would then be used to engage in wider consultation to get a Strategy in place fairly quickly.

In response to queries from Mrs McGeary, Mr Archdale explained that the three pillars of the strategy would be social, economic and environmental. He added that further detail would be available through the initial draft strategy in September 2020.

In response to a further query from Mrs Martin, Dr Cush clarified that ERASMUS was open for applications until the end of the year and that new programmes were being explored.

The Chair then explained that this may be Ms O'Donnell's last Governing Body meeting as her contract was coming to an end, and he extended his appreciation to her for her

support. The Chief Executive endorsed these comments, thanking Ms O'Donnell from on behalf of the management team.

The Chair also extended his appreciation to IT staff for supporting governors with online meetings.

13.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

The Chief Executive advised that he intended to update across five areas: (i) update on students; (ii) update on a recovery consultation from the Department; (iii) an update on the budget from the Department; (iv) situation in the Erne Campus and; (v) College recovery documents.

13.1 Students

The Chief Executive assured members that the majority of students that hoped to progress in September would receive an award, in most cases a full award. He acknowledged that for some it would be a partial award. He further explained that with the process of calculated grades, the College cannot communicate final grades to students as Awarding Organisations would publish results at the end of August 2020. At this stage the Chief Executive anticipated a situation where the College would be 2-3% points below a normal year which he acknowledged would be phenomenal. The Chief Executive further advised Ministerial approval had been granted to process simulated assessments for work based learning students and that the College was currently dealing with these. He explained that this affected approximately 2.5 – 3k students across sector but only 60 in South West College. Students had been brought on site this week he explained to take final assessments, which would hopefully mean they can progress in September 2020. He reported no difficulty with Unions locally.

Mrs Martin then outlined a success story of a former colleague who achieved a counselling qualification through the College. She added that it would be useful for the Chief Executive to speak directly to this individual.

Mr Archdale commented that this was a very positive outcome and a credit to the staff and students involved. He suggested that it would be useful to quantify the financial and resource implications of choosing Awarding Organisations for the College. In response the Chief Executive advised there were around 84 awarding organisation's in Northern Ireland and that the College worked with 41 or 42 of these. Two of the sector working groups had been asked to look at the potential for colleges to become awarding organisations, in terms of costs, protocols and potential savings he advised. The Chair added that the current situation had shown up the stress points and the weaknesses in the current awarding system.

Mrs Moore extended congratulations to the Chief Executive and his team for making so much progress on awards since the last Education, Quality and Performance Committee Meeting on 20 May 2020.

In response to concerns from Mr El Marif, the Chief Executive confirmed that while predicted grades could not be issued this year, grades should be published on time to allow students to progress.

13.2 DfE Recovery Consultation Paper

The Chief Executive advised that the Department for the Economy had come forward with a number of suggestions to support the wider recovery. The sector had submitted a detailed response against each of these measures. The Department for the Economy he advised would be making a bid to the Department of Finance for these proposals which included (i) a wage subsidy for apprentices; (ii) employer incentives; (iii) support for displaced apprentices through an 'adopt an apprentice' scheme; (iv) extension of the current Training for Success programme; (v) an advanced vocational and technical award at Level 3; (vi) employer and training provider partnerships to develop new apprenticeships and; (vii) enhanced support for careers service. The Chief Executive advised that while this approach was generally endorsed by the sector, one of the key concerns would be the administration of outputs from this. He added that there were also concerns about recycling existing money and the timeframes involved.

13.3 College Recovery Documents

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED to all members:

- Paper 13.1 SWC Covid-19 Recovery Plan 19.06.2020
- Paper 13.2 Temporary Return to Campus and Continuation of Remote Working Policy (draft)

Referring to the papers previously circulated, the Chief Executive advised that these had been the out workings of the College recovery team and included preparation for staff and students resuming College activity. The Chair explained that as and when staff come back, governors could take full assurance that it would be done correctly and safely. Mrs Martin endorsed these comments, adding that the documents reflected a very clear focus on keeping staff safe and she commended everyone involved.

In response to a query from Mr O'Hanlon, Dr Cush advised that safety was the objective of the Recovery Plan (Paper 13.01) alongside building confidence. She outlined the planning phases and management structure involved in producing this Plan. She then advised that the outputs (Section 11) would be important to look at and included a series of outputs for each working group. The Recovery Plan was a key document within this along with the College Development Plan she advised.

Dr Cush then outlined the temporary policy to cover return to campus and continuation of remote working (Paper 13.2). This document provided guidance and a framework for home working and also ensured that decision making around staff returning would be fair and equitable. She sought the support of the Governing Body for this temporary policy.

Mr Archdale commended the work done to date, but added that he would like to see more detail on people with disabilities and people at risk due to their ethnicity.

Mr McGuckin then queried the role/responsibility of staff in ensuring social distancing. In response the Chief Executive advised that staff would be responsible for ensuring guidelines were adhered to in classrooms and general areas. BES he advised would cover entrances and staff would be briefed in advance on what is safe. He noted however that discipline was generally not an issue in the College.

Mr Skuce queried if the default position for staff was if you can work from home stay at home. In response, the Chief Executive advised that staff were being asked to return on a voluntary basis at the moment.

13.4 Budget Update

The Chief Executive advised that the opening indicative resource budget was received on 17 April 2020 and was subsequently updated on 17 June 2020. He outlined the highlights of this for members including an additional sum of more than £140k to purchase 200 laptops. He also advised that the skills focus programme employer contribution had been waived. In relation to rates, he explained that LPS were now indicating that the sector rates pressure would be £1.6m and not £3m as originally estimated. He noted that this would reduce pressure for South West College but added that the rates bill was effectively budget neutral for the College. The Chief Executive also advised that a small amount of money would be transferred to Belfast Met for payroll services. In conclusion, he advised that the opening resource allocation was £27.3m, with around £48k still to be secured for rates. The Chair noted that this was a good result for the College.

The Chief Executive then advised that Michael Camplisson had urgently requested colleges to provide updated estimates in terms of loss of income as a result of Covid-19. He had also requested information on new resource expenditure or possible easements the colleges might have as a result of Covid-19.

14.0 FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED to all members:

- Paper 14 Minutes of 10 June 2020 Finance and General Purposes Committee Meeting

In presenting the report of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 10 June 2020, Mr McCaffrey, Committee Chair, outlined the key strategic issues update in the first instance. Assurances had been received from the Chief Executive at the meeting in terms of both the Erne Project and PFI he reported. In terms of the Management Report Mr McCaffrey outlined good financial performance, an increase in the part time lecturing budget and an additional £1m for minor works. He advised that the estates report had been considered and added that BES had been requested to supply additional information to the Committee. Mr McCaffrey also outlined a presentation from Mr Ciaran McManus on the Financial Performance of the Centre's for Excellence, after which it was agreed that the terms of reference for this presentation should be reviewed alongside those of the heads of faculty.

In response to a query from Mrs McCaffrey, the Chief Executive confirmed that students would be returning to the Gortin Road site and not the Killybrack site. He explained that the College had upgraded the Gortin Road site, which now offered a lot more space and was a much safer site for students.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr McCaffrey, seconded by Mr McGuckin, adoption of the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting and the

recommendations therein. These minutes were not signed as the meeting was conducted online.

15.0 UPDATE ON BUDGETS

Mr Sean O'Donnell, Head of Finance, joined the meeting for this item

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 15 Budget Update

Through his presentation, Mr O'Donnell advised that the budget setting process had been completed and was presented to the Finance and General Purposes Committee on 10 June 2020. Projected income was £46.8m he advised, although he emphasized that this figure was significantly caveated with a probable budget revision in October 2020 once enrolment figures were known. He noted increased staff costs and an increased part time lecturing budget. In terms of non-pay costs, he outlined savings initiatives in place, alongside an extra £150k for PPE. He also advised that he was proposing to use unused budget allocation in the current year to fund PPE requirements for the incoming year. Finally, Mr O'Donnell advised that the College was showing an accounting deficit £3.281m, which when adjusted for non-cash items, resulted in a cash deficit of £830k. He also noted that cash balances were significantly higher than last year. Mr O'Donnell added that rates pressure had recently eased significantly.

Mr O'Donnell then spoke about the uncertainties around potential loss of income, expenditure on PPE and the 2020/21 teaching model. The impact of Covid-19 was not fully known he advised, but noted that the situation should be clearer in September 2020.

The Chair then noted that this was as positive a financial report as could be hoped for in the current climate and he extended his appreciation to Mr O'Donnell and his team for this. Mrs McGeary also extended her congratulations to the management team for robust financial management in challenging circumstances, noting in particular the visibility and confidence governors could take from the information. The Chair echoed these comments.

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

16.0 ERNE CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

The Chief Executive advised that a communication had been received on 1 June 2020 confirming that the Department would release all of the optimism bias. On 17 June 2020 a further communication was received confirming additional money to cover Covid-19 costs. He noted that negotiations were ongoing with IST in terms of costs. In terms of the programme, he advised that the potential completion date was now 19 December 2020, but added that this would be discussed at the Project Board meeting the following day. The Chief Executive also outlined an issue with platform lifts for the teaching steps in the atrium which was being addressed. In terms of governance, he advised that the first site progress meeting since lockdown had taken place via Teams

on 11 June 2020, adding that the Project Team were able to access the site this week and could confirm that the site looked well and appropriate safety procedures were in place. He noted that BREEAM Outstanding had now been achieved with 88.11% credits against a target of 85%. He also noted that PassivHaus Premium would be achieved with an additional 3kw of panels on the roof. The Chief Executive advised that the rock issue was still unresolved but added that the White Young Green report supported the College. Finally, he noted that they would aim to increase the standard of fit out where possible.

17.0 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED to all members:

- Paper 17 Minutes of 13 May 2020 Audit and Risk Committee Meeting

In presenting the report of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 May 2020, Mrs McCaffrey, Committee Chair, advised that the Committee had received two presentations. The first of these was from Mrs Eimear Grugan, Project Sponsor for the Erne Project and looked at the main risks of the Erne Project. In terms of Covid-19, both DfE and CPD considered the Covid pandemic to be an event under the term of the project which would be dealt with as a normal compensation event. Mrs Grugan also identified the inability of the College to manage, operate and maintain the building to PassiveHaus and BREEAM standards as a risk. To mitigate against this risk, the properties division was putting in place new framework to deal with planned and preventive maintenance at the new site. Mrs McCaffrey advised that planned handover date of 6 August 2020 was no longer possible, adding that further information on the new handover date should be available at the Project Board meeting the following day. The risk of not achieving BREEAM and PassiveHaus standards was being diminished Mrs McCaffrey advised.

The second presentation to the Committee was from Mr Padraig McNamee, Head of Automotive, Computing and Engineering Faculty, Mrs McCaffrey advised. Mr McNamee outlined the risks for his Faculty, with a particular focus on Covid 19 she advised.

Mrs McCaffrey also detailed the contents of a presentation from the internal auditors, Grant Thornton, whom she noted had reached the end of their contract. Grant Thornton had completed three audits with satisfactory assurance since the last Committee meeting. The student engagement audit was unable to be completed due to the lockdown but she assured members that this would be programmed in the new audit schedule. Mrs McCaffrey then extended her appreciation to Grant Thornton for the work they had carried out over the last three years and she also congratulated the senior management team on generally satisfactory audit findings in the 2019/20 year. Proposed audit areas for 2020/21 had been discussed and would be finalized with the new auditors in September 2020 she advised.

Mrs McCaffrey advised that PWC had outlined their proposed approach for the audit of the financial statements which she noted would be risk based and would consider the three significant risk areas of the Erne Camus development, material misstatement arising from management overriding of controls and the risk to revenue recognition

generally. She also advised that the audit programme could see slight delays because of the impact of remote-working. Other areas to be reviewed would include the use of CPD for procurement and management of contracts, the pension scheme and accounting for PFI lifecycle costs.

Mrs McCaffrey further advised that the new letter of understanding provided by the Audit Office and signed by the Chief Executive had been discussed. Finally, she noted the progress that had been made on data security with additional funds made available to reinforce security measures for IT.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mr McGuckin, adoption of the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were not signed as the meeting was conducted online.

18.0 STAFFING COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED to all members:

- Paper 18 Minutes of 03 June 2020 Staffing Committee Meeting

In presenting the report of the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 03 June 2020, Mrs McDowell, Committee Chair, advised that the Committee received an update on the Covid-19 recovery plan, including details of the three working groups (Curriculum, People and Estates). She noted that the College would keep their contingency measures under review. The Committee agreed that the new management structure had worked exceptionally well during the present crisis and had further agreed that the planned review of this new structure should be considered in September 2020. Mrs McDowell further reported no significant issues with the switch over to the new payroll service, a very positive ETI report for the College and a new process for onboarding of staff.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Mc Dowell, seconded by Mr Skuce, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were not signed as the meeting was conducted online.

19.0 EDUCATION, QUALITY AND PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE REPORT

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED to all members:

- Paper 19 Minutes of 20 May 2020 Education, Quality and Performance Committee Meeting

In presenting the report of the Education, Quality and Performance Committee meeting held on Wednesday 20 May 2020, Mrs Moore, Committee Chair, advised that the Committee had received a strategic issue overview from the Chief Executive where he had given assurances about the remote learning guide for students and also outlined problems with grading for apprentices. In terms of the quality of teaching and learning the Chief Executive had advised that staff were very engaged in learning new skills in terms of remote delivery, but he also emphasized the pressure on staff and students in the new learning model. The Chief Executive had also outlined a positive ETI inspection and further advised that the College Development Plan had been

delayed this year as a result of Covid-19. He further advised that the Quality Assurance Manager was leading the development of the procedures for the assessments for FE students and that the College was hopeful for some new university level validations. There was a significant focus on safeguarding Mrs Moore advised and the Chief Executive had provided assurances around this. Mrs Moore noted that the Marketing Strategy was unlikely to be in place for June, but added that the Committee had received assurances from Mr McManus through his management report around the innovative new marketing strategies the College was looking at in these challenging times. Mr McManus also outlined validation for six new foundation degrees for the College through his management report she advised. He had further provided interesting insights into how social media use had increased since lockdown and provided assurances around the levels of engagement in digital learning. From this management report, Mrs Moore recommended two policies to the Governing Body for approval – (i) Careers Education Information and Advice Policy and; (ii) FE Personal Tutoring and Academic Support Policy.

Mrs Moore then outlined a presentation from Mrs Carol Viney, Head of Professional and Social Sciences Faculty. The Committee she advised had also discussed staff resilience at length. The Committee had received assurances that the College was managing the workload staff were facing and staff would be encouraged to take a break over the summer period. Finally, Mrs Moore advised that Dr Cush had advised that the College does take part in the National Student Survey.

In response to a query from Mrs McCaffrey, the Chief Executive explained that the validation on the new HE courses was a mixture of new business and replacement courses. He noted there had been great interest in these HE programmes to date and that this should increase the MaSN intake. In response to a further query from Mrs McCaffrey he advised that the College did not plan to run many summer courses this year, to avoid putting additional pressure on staff. The focus he advised would be on recruitment. Mr McGuckin sought assurance that staff would get a proper break over the summer and the Chief Executive confirmed that this would be the case. Mrs Martin added that it was important for the management team to take a break too. In relation to the new validations, she enquired how many courses were now being validated by the OU and also if the Chief Executive saw this as the direction of travel. In response the Chief Executive advised that there were currently seven programmes validated, with Transport and Logistics to be validated the following week. Ms Breen added that through this process the College had been commended for the support it provided to students and for their industry links, adding that one of the comments from one of the panels was that the College had really raised the profile of HE in the area. Mr Archdale commented that student expectations around sustainability seem to have gained quite a bit of traction over the lockdown. In response the Chief Executive advised that recent marketing campaigns had gained quite a bit of traction and that the College was now in a good position to compete with other providers further afield.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mr McGuckin, adoption of the minutes of the Education, Quality and Performance Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were not signed as the meeting was conducted online.

20.0 SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS 2020/21

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 20 Schedule of Meetings 2020/21

Ms O'Donnell advised that the schedule indicated that meetings would be taking place on campus but that this was unlikely at the present time, and advised that meetings would take place on Teams until such times as it was safe for them to resume on campus.

NOTED.

21.0 DECLARATION OF ANY HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

22.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

The Chair asked if the Chief Executive could communicate appreciation from the Governing Body to staff for extraordinary work in extraordinary times. The Chief Executive confirmed that he would arrange this and he thanked the Governing Body for this support and for their support throughout the year.

23.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

It was noted that there were no outstanding actions.

24.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

The Chair invited members to contact him with any feedback on the pace of meetings.

Members conveyed their satisfaction with the proceedings.

In concluding, the Chair noted that the Governing Body would meet again on 16 September 2020. He added that if there was a need to meet before this, he and the Chief Executive would arrange this.

The meeting concluded at 7:40 pm.

**CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 16 SEPTEMBER
2020**

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____