

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 5 May 2021 at 5:30 pm
via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

- Mr Peter Archdale
- Mrs Deborah Brown
- Mr Michael McAlister (Chief Executive)
- Mrs Patricia McCaffrey
- Mr Seamus McCaffrey (*Items 1.0 to 9.0 only*)
- Mrs Gillian McDowell
- Mrs Monica McGeary
- Mr Michael McGuckin
- Mrs Joanne Moore
- Mr Gerard O’Hanlon
- Dr Nicholas O’Shiel (Chairman)
- Mr Michael Skuce
- Miss Clara Jane Whitley

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive
- Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body

APOLOGIES:

- Ms Siobhan Breen
- Mrs Margaret Martin
- Mrs Tracey McElroy, Boardroom Apprentice

1.0 PRELIMINARIES

Dr O’Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting and extended his gratitude to Mr Skuce for chairing the previous Governing Body meeting in his absence.

2.0 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Ms Breen, Mrs Martin and Mrs McElroy.

3.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

4.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 10 March 2021.

With reference to minute 5.0, Dr O’Shiel reported that governors whose term of office had been extended until 31 July 2021 by the Department for the Economy (DfE) would be offered a further extension to 31 December 2021 and thanked relevant members for accepting these extensions. He advised that he had appraised the Director of

Further Education, DfE, of the Governing Body's concerns regarding skills gaps and the simultaneous loss of five governors and would continue to liaise with her on these matters.

5.0 **CHAIR'S BUSINESS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01 Centre Assessment Policy
- Paper 04.02 NI College of the Future Report.

Centre Assessment Policy – Dr O'Shiel reported that he had approved the College's Centre Assessment Policy following consultation with Mrs Moore, Chair of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee, as the submission timeframe had not facilitated approval through the usual channels. Mr McAlister advised that the policy sets the regulatory framework for the implementation of Centre Determined Grades, the means by which student grades will be awarded in the 2020/21 academic year due to the exceptional circumstances arising from the Covid-19 pandemic.

In response to questions from members, Mr McAlister explained that private candidates are those who use the college's assessment centre without being a student of the college, provided assurances that conflicts of interest between students and staff are identified and managed, and confirmed his expectation that the Centre Determined Grades process will be unique to the 2020/21 year only.

NI College of the Future Report – Dr O'Shiel referred to the publication of the College of the Future Report for Northern Ireland (NI). He reminded members that the report had not been commissioned by DfE and therefore does not represent government policy at this time. He also advised that a proposal for a new delivery model for further education (FE) in NI had been developed by DfE but had not yet been approved. Mr McAlister referred members to the five recommendations made within the report highlighting the recommendation to establish a single coherent college structure.

Retirement of Director of FE – Dr O'Shiel informed the meeting of the forthcoming retirement of Ms Beverley Harrison, Director of FE, DfE.

Budget – Dr O'Shiel advised that an update on the 2021/22 budget will be provided by Mr McAlister later in the meeting and commented on his comfort with the opening indicative resource allocation.

6.0 **CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS**

Budget – Mr McAlister reported that an opening indicative resource allocation of £27.132m, subject to ministerial approval of MaSN allocations, CDP and divisional budget, had been communicated. He explained that resource requirements arising from Covid-19 impacts and any negotiated lecturer pay award will be managed separately and that funding for Traineeships will be provided through additional budget provision. He valued sectoral inescapable pay pressures at £6.288m, explained that funding of £4.7m had been secured to contribute towards these pressures, detailed the channels through which the remainder is likely to be funded and reported that colleges have been advised to draft College Development Plans on the assumption that all inescapable pay pressures will be covered. Mr McAlister also commented on the opportunity to gain additional higher education places and on the efficiencies

expected through the new sectoral procurement framework. He concluded by expressing his comfort with the opening indicative resource allocation.

Covid-19 – Mr McAlister provided statistics on Covid-19 diagnoses within the college community noting that five cases had been confirmed in April 2021 bringing the cumulative total since September 2020 to 140. He explained that staff and students had been asked to participate in a Lateral Flow Device testing pilot on a voluntary basis with a view to identifying infected individuals at an early stage and reducing the spread of the virus. He provided an update on the return to on-site learning and commented on the challenge in completing all required practical demonstrations and assessments in the limited time available. He also advised the meeting that the Quality Assurance Manager will represent the sector, along with colleagues from two other colleges, at a meeting of the NI Assembly Committee for the Economy.

7.0 ERNE CAMPUS PROJECT UPDATE

Takeover – Mr McAlister confirmed that the College took possession of the Erne campus on 16th April 2021 facilitating access for deliveries, fit-out and familiarization. He explained that handover is anticipated in late May and that all outstanding works will be added to the defects register in the meantime.

Sectoral Capital Projects Steering Group Meeting – Mr McAlister informed the meeting that the next sectoral Capital Projects Steering Group meeting will be held in the Erne campus with appropriate Covid-19 mitigations in place. He added that representatives from DfE and other colleges will be in attendance.

Covid-19 Impacts – Mr McAlister advised that work is ongoing in validating Integrated Supply Team (IST) claims for additional costs incurred as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Gateway 4 Review – Mr McAlister reported that an Amber / Green confidence rating has been awarded following the 'Readiness for Service' Gateway review and noted that this is the highest available rating before building occupation. He made the meeting aware of the recommendations made by the review team as well as of the comments received on the positive engagement of all involved.

Sustainability Standards – Mr McAlister confirmed the Erne Campus' receipt of BREEAM Outstanding certification as well as the BREEAM 2021 Public Sector Projects Design Stage Award. He also confirmed the submission of all required information for assessment for PassivHaus Premium accreditation and noted that the campus would hold the record for the largest new PassivHaus Premium educational building in the world should the accreditation be achieved.

Budget – Mr McAlister advised that a within budget outturn is forecast.

Rock Excavation Compensation Event – Mr McAlister reported that settlement had been achieved on the compensation event relating to rock excavation following a mediation process.

Risks – Mr McAlister explained that some manageable risks remain and that these will transfer from the Project Risk Register to the Corporate Risk Register.

Mr Archdale congratulated all staff involved in bringing the Erne Campus from concept to fruition and referred to the building as the flagship project in the College's One Planet Living framework. He apprised the meeting of a forthcoming One Planet Living workshop aimed at identifying actions to progress themes emerging from previous workshops and invited members to attend. He also commented on the additional staff

resource requirements for the Erne Campus and referred to the repository of One Planet Living information available in the Learning Resource Centre.

Members' supported Mr Archdale in congratulating those involved in the development of the Erne Project. Mr McAlister was commended for his leadership as Senior Responsible Owner and Chair of the Project Board and Mrs McCaffrey and Mr McGuckin were thanked for their contributions as members of the Project Board.

8.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION, QUALITY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee held on Wednesday 24 March 2021
- Paper 07.02 Fitness to Practice Policy
- Paper 07.03 NI FE Colleges Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy
- Paper 07.04 NI FE Colleges Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy – Covid-19 Addendum
- Paper 07.05 Marketing Strategy.

With reference to the minutes of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting held on Wednesday 24 March 2021, the Committee Chair, Mrs Moore, provided an overview of the updates given on strategic issues including Covid-19 recovery, student matters, the curriculum and the quality of teaching and learning.

She went on to refer to the Management Report presented to the Committee and highlighted the assurances received on the proportion of students studying subjects in high demand areas as well as the alignment of college provision with industry skills demands. She listed the key features of the Marketing Strategy 2021-24 and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for the Governing Body's approval of this strategy as well as the Fitness to Practice Policy and the NI FE Colleges Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy and associated Covid-19 addendum.

Mrs Moore explained that a presentation had also been received on the Performance and Strategic Plans of the Built Environment, Creative & Life Services Faculty. She commented on the decreased part-time FE enrolments due to the Covid-19 pandemic, on the positive industry engagement governing curriculum relevance through Industry Advisory Boards and on the continued commitment of staff to the education and welfare of students.

A discussion then followed during which members provided feedback on the Marketing Strategy 2021-24. The range of provision available to young people in the wider education sector was acknowledged and the importance of ensuring that each student has access to the pathway best suited to their individual needs was recognized. It was agreed that members' feedback on the Marketing Strategy 2021-24 be captured and that the strategy be approved subject to its amendment to reflect the comments made.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mr McGuckin, adoption of the minutes of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

9.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 21 APRIL 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 21 April 2021
- Paper 09.02 Banking Mandates.

Reporting on the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 21 April 2021, Mr McCaffrey, Committee Chair, began by listing the Committee's key strategic issues and noting that updates on these items had been provided by the Chief Executive earlier in the meeting.

Moving on to the Management Report, he confirmed that the Annual Report & Financial Statements 2019/20 had been laid before the NI Assembly following their approval by the Governing Body at its last meeting, referenced the detailed reports provided on financial accounting and financial compliance, commented on the work involved in administering the distribution of Covid-19 support payments to students, noted the preparations underway in setting the 2021/22 budget, explained that information in relation to the College's PFI contracts remains outstanding from Belfast Educational Services, and drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Banking Mandates.

Mr McCaffrey also referred to the presentation received on the financial performance of the Business Development Section and highlighted the alternative funding sources sought for student and staff mobilities previously funded through the Erasmus programme.

In response to a question on the increase in bad debt provision, Mr McAlister explained that a marginal increase in student debt is expected. He commented on the challenge in ensuring that students develop the practical skills required to earn a license to practice in their limited time on-campus and noted that colleges' attendance at the meeting of the NI Assembly Committee of the Economy is indicative of the concern in this area. It was also noted that only a small proportion of the circa £23k of bad debt written off relates to student debt.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr McCaffrey, seconded by Mr O'Hanlon, 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.

Mr McCaffrey withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

10.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 14 APRIL 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 14 April 2021
- Paper 08.02 Staff Resource Report
- Paper 08.03 Fixed Term Contracts Report
- Paper 08.04 Section 75 Non-Compliance Complaints Policy
- Paper 08.05 Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy
- Paper 08.06 Workforce Development Policy
- Paper 08.07 Additional Staff Requests.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 14 April 2021, Mrs McDowell, Chair of the Staffing Committee, began by referring to the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues highlighting the discussion held on the recommendations within the NI College of the Future Report as well as the update given on lecturers' pay negotiations.

Mrs McDowell then provided an overview of the Management Report received by the Committee. She noted the development of an action plan in response to a Staff Wellbeing Survey, the deferral of discussion on the Head of Business Development post until receipt of the report of the review of the College's culture and structure, the progress of the staff appraisal programme, the continued action short of strike by UCU members and the prioritization of the recovery of the payroll system following an IT incident. She also drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Section 75 Non-Compliance Complaints Policy, the Alcohol & Substance Misuse Policy and the Workforce Development Policy as well as the Chair of the Governing Body's approval of the appointments, staff requests and fixed term-contract proposals as outlined in the minutes. Mrs McDowell also expressed the Committee's condolences on the death of Mr Colin McCormick, a long serving member of staff in the Enniskillen campus.

In response to questions and comments from members, assurance was provided on the adequacy of the arrangements in place to cover the responsibilities of the Head of Business Development until a permanent arrangement is put in place and the feasibility of undertaking observations of online lessons was confirmed. Regarding the IT incident, it was noted that the excess had been waived by the insurers in light of the IT team's swift and decisive action in identifying the attack and closing down systems at an early stage and the IT team was commended for its vigilance and early interventions in responding to the IT incident.

At a later stage in the meeting, Dr Cush drew attention to the additional staff requests listed in paper 08.07 and these were approved by the Governing Body.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell, seconded by Mrs McGeary, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendations within as well as the additional staff requests listed in paper 08.07. 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

Mr McAlister reported the Erne Project Team's receipt of a number of small gifts from the IST, advised that DfE had been informed of the offer and confirmed that the gifts had been recorded on the College's Gifts & Hospitality Register.

12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

13.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12 Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that the outstanding item regarding liaison with DfE on the turnover of governors had been actioned and reported earlier in the meeting.

14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Mr Archdale recorded a problem with accessing the meeting on M Teams. Mrs McCauley undertook to investigate the issue.

The Staff and Student Governors withdrew from the meeting at this juncture. The meeting then went into confidential session and concluded at 8:00 pm.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 30 JUNE 2021

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____