SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee**
held on Wednesday 17 January 2024 at 5.00 pm
via MS Teams
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PRESENT:	Mrs Deborah Brown
	Mrs Maureen Brunt (*from item 5.2.1*)
	Dr Frances Campbell
	Mr Tom Corr
	Mr Diarmuid Hanna
	Mrs Sandra Isherwood
	Ms Celine McCartan, Chief Executive
	Ms Anne McCleary
	Dr Lynsey Quinn, Committee Chair
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
	Ms Noreern McGirr, Higher Level Apprenticeship Programme Manager (*item 6.0*)
	Mr Brian McIlduff, Head of Quality & Student Engagement (*item 5.0*)
	Mr Padraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum

1.0   PRELIMINARIES AND APOLOGIES

Dr Quinn welcomed all present to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to Mr Hanna and Mr Corr, on their first attendance at a Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting.

She acknowledged the need to transition the meeting to virtual mode due to the potentially hazardous driving conditions and asked members to exercise diligence in virtual meetings etiquette.

She also requested that focus is placed on the Department for the Economy's (DfE) objectives for the further education (FE) sector of increasing enrolments, reducing costs and enhancing quality.

It was noted that no apologies had been tendered and that Mrs Brunt would join the meeting in due course.

2.0   CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

Dr Quinn noted her employment with the Open University, drew attention to the reference to it in the papers and undertook to recuse herself from any related discussions to which she may be conflicted. She also highlighted an error in the Management Report referencing two Northern Ireland universities.

3.0   MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03   Minutes of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee meeting held on Wednesday 25 October 2023.

There were no matters arising.

4.0   KEY STRATEGIC ISSUES

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04.01   List of Key Strategic Issues
- Paper 04.02   Management Update on Key Strategic Issues
- Paper 04.03   Ulster University Future Skills Needs Presentation.

4.1   Curriculum Profile

In providing context for the College's curriculum profile, Ms McCartan informed the Committee of the publication of the report of the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland and referenced the presentation on future skills needs in paper 04.03. She drew attention to the recommendations made in the report of the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland in relation to the future of FE, noting in particular the need for both collaboration and clear lines of demarcation between schools, FE colleges and universities. She also highlighted the projected skills shortfall at levels 3 and 4 as outlined in the presentation on future skills needs and undertook to present an analysis of sub-regional skills needs when available.

Ms McCartan then referenced the 2023/24 College Development Plan outlining the current year curriculum provision and reported on the development of the 2024/25 curriculum offer and associated marketing strategy.

In response to a question on the extent to which regional curriculum development meets local needs, management commented on the balance to be achieved in collaborative curriculum development and ensuring that the specific skills needs of local employers are met.

ACTION: Management to present an analysis of sub-regional skills needs when available.

4.2   Student Experience

Ms McCartan reported on the positive feedback received in student surveys to date in 2023/24 as well as on the meetings planned to explore the aspirations of students in relation to their experience in the College.

4.3   Essential Skills and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL)

Ms McCartan spoke of the review underway to ascertain the reasons for the College's poor success rates in Essential Skills and ESOL. She outlined the issues identified to date as well as the interventions put in place to address the barriers to success.

4.4   Review of Special Educational Needs (SEN)

Ms McCartan informed the Committee of the challenges in relation to SEN provision including the increased demand, the limited availability of Learning Support Workers and the need for all college provision to evidence a contribution to economic activity. She suggested

that a review of SEN provision is undertaken and a strategy developed, undertook to present a draft Terms of Reference for such a review to the Committee for its endorsement and welcomed members' input into this review.

ACTION: Management to present a draft Terms of Reference for a review of Special Educational Needs provision to the Committee for its endorsement.

5.0   MANAGEMENT REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05   Management Report
- Paper 05.01   2023/24 College Development Plan
- Paper 05.02   Educational Report Card
- Paper 05.03   Engineering Operational Plan
- Paper 05.04   Computing Operational Plan
- Paper 05.05   Creative Industries Operational Plan
- Paper 05.06   Health, Life & Personal Services Operational Plan
- Paper 05.07   Commercial & Business Services Operational Plan
- Paper 05.08   Sustainability, Construction & Transport Operational Plan
- Paper 05.09   Average Class Size 2023/24
- Paper 05.10   Course Hours 2023/24
- Paper 05.11   Staff Deployment 2023/24 v 2022/23
- Paper 05.12   Draft Terms of Reference of Interim Evaluation of Level 2 NI Traineeships
- Paper 05.13   Draft Whole College Self-Evaluation & Quality Improvement Impact Interim Report
- Paper 05.14   Student Achievement Rates to December 2023
- Paper 05.15   Quality and Student Experience Report
- Paper 05.16   Full Student Feedback Report
- Paper 05.17   Business Development Unit Report
- Paper 05.18   EU Funded Projects Report
- Paper 05.19   Marketing Strategic Projects Update
- Paper 05.20   Fitness to Practice Policy
- Paper 05.21   Submission of Coursework Policy
- Paper 05.22   FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy
- Paper 05.23   Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy
- Paper 05.24   Anti-Bullying Policy for Students.

Mr McIlduff joined the meeting for this item.

5.1   College Development Plan

5.1.1   College Outcomes

Ref: Management Report Section 1.1 and Papers 05.01 – 05.11

Mr McNamee began by advising the meeting of the transition in focus from the curriculum profile and the efficiency of its delivery to the quality of the curriculum delivered. He went on to comment on the good performance evidenced in the most recent educational report card, his satisfaction with the efficiency of curriculum delivery in terms of class sizes, course

hours and staff deployment, the need for improvements in data and reporting management, and the refinement of departmental operational plans which will inform 2024/25 marketing activities. He also detailed the work underway to enhance engagement with school students, expand the College's online provision, establish additional apprenticeship courses and develop the College's Gold Apprenticeship brand.

5.1.2 Curriculum Developments

Ref: Management Report Section 1.2 and Paper 05.12

Mr McNamee drew attention to the recommendations made in relation to FE in the report of the Independent Review of Education in Northern Ireland as listed in the Management Report including clear lines of demarcation between the provision of schools, FE colleges and universities and the expansion of apprenticeships into the public sector and to all ages. He added that All Age Apprenticeships have now been introduced and are being explored under the Strategic Alliance with Northern Regional College and North West Regional College.

5.1.3 College Developments

Ref: Management Report Section 1.3

Mr McNamee apprised the Committee of the transition of curriculum provision to employment based programmes where possible as well as the work to be done in developing further curriculum in sustainability and green technologies. He also referenced the forthcoming internal review of SEN provision and outlined the impact on enrolments of the change in the funding model for community based recreational courses.

In response to questions from members, Mr McNamee advised that the reasons for the below sector average enrolments from the over 25 age group is under investigation and explained that the increased cost to external organisations of community based recreational courses has led to the significant decrease in demand for such provision and that impacted lecturers have been redeployed to other areas.

ACTION: Management to report on the outcome of investigations into the below sector average enrolments from the over 25 age group.

5.2 Quality Assurance

5.2.1 Success Rates

Ref: Management Report Section 2.2 and Paper 05.14

Mr McNamee apprised the meeting of the importance of both efficient curriculum administration and good student experience in achieving required success rates. He outlined the challenges encountered in terms of data management and student experience as well as the actions taken to address the issues identified and commented on the work to be done in these areas including systems automation and coaching training for Curriculum Managers.

Dr Campbell undertook to offer advice in identifying means of automating systems to create resource efficiencies.

Mrs Brunt joined the meeting at this juncture.

5.2.2   Student Support

Ref: Management Report Section 2.3 and Paper 05.15

Mr McNamee reported on the additional capacity made available for counselling services to meet demand from students as well as on the maximisation of the funding received to provide meals for students.

5.2.3   Student Feedback

Ref: Management Report Section 2.4 and Papers 05.15 & 05.16

Mr McNamee noted the largely positive feedback received from students as detailed in the reports provided and spoke of the need to put systems in place to obtain real-time feedback on the student experience.

5.2.4   Teaching & Learning

Ref: Management Report Section 2.5 and Paper 05.15

Mr McNamee explained that additional classes will be put in place to support learners impacted by class cancellations due to industrial action. He also made members aware of the proposed escalation of the industrial action.

5.3   Business Development

Ref: Management Report Section 3.0 and Papers 05.17 & 05.18

Mr McNamee referenced the reports provided on business development activity and EU funded projects, highlighting the planned student mobilities under the Erasmus and Turing schemes. He also commented on the ongoing work to enhance collaboration between business development and curriculum teams.

5.4   Strategic Partnerships

Ref: Management Report Section 4.0

Mr McNamee provided an overview of the College's partnership with the Nerve Centre noting the recommendation for continued collaborations with close monitoring of outcomes.

5.5   Resourcing

Ref: Management Report Section 5.0

Mr McNamee reported on the proposal to utilise under deployed staff to cover staff absences and on the need to consult trade unions on this proposal.

5.6   Events and PR

Ref: Management Report Section 6.0 and Paper 05.19

The update provided on marketing strategic projects was noted by the Committee.

5.7   Curriculum Projects

Ref: Management Report Section 7.0

The update provided on curriculum projects was noted by the Committee.

5.8 **Risks**

Ref: Management Report Section 8.0

Mr McNamee referenced the risks listed in section 8.0 of the Management Report, noting the need for additional classes to be put in place to support learners impacted by class cancellations due to industrial action as well as the need for the development of more robust data management processes.

5.9 **Policy Reviews**

Ref: Management Report Section 8.0 and Papers 05.20, 05.21, 05.22, 05.33 & 05.24

Mr McNamee referenced management's review of the Fitness to Practice Policy, the Submission of Coursework Policy, the FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy, the Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy and the Anti-Bullying Policy for Students.

At the suggestion of a member, management undertook to further review the Anti-Bullying Policy for Students to outline the support available to students impacted by bullying.

ACTION: Management to further review the Anti-Bullying Policy for students to outline the support available to students impacted by bullying.

AGREED: That the Fitness to Practice Policy, the Submission of Coursework Policy, the FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy and the Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy be recommended to the Governing Body for approval.

5.10 **Relevant Policies, Background Information and Documents**

Ref: Management Report Section 10.0

Mr McNamee referenced the relevant policies, strategies and reports listed in section 10 of the Management Report.

5.11 **Quality Assurance (Continued)**

5.11.1 Interim College Self-Evaluation Report

Ref: Management Report Section 2.1 and Paper 05.13

Mr McIlduff provided an overview of the draft Whole College Self-Evaluation & Quality Improvement Impact Interim Report in paper 05.13. In doing so he highlighted the challenges in data reporting for traineeships, apprenticeships and other programmes comprising a framework of qualifications; drew attention to the strengths identified in the areas of collaboration, learner support and lecturer support; and outlined the areas for development as student feedback, data management, essential skills integration and balancing the use of artificial intelligence to aid learning whilst maintaining the integrity of assessments. He concluded by confirming the College's self-assessment of its overall performance level as 'good' and by undertaking to circulate the final report when available.

A discussion then ensued on the benefits and challenges presented by artificial intelligence in teaching and learning. It was suggested that a review of policies is undertaken to ascertain their sufficiency in setting the framework for the use of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning and it was noted that standalone guidance may be required.

ACTIONS:

- **Management to circulate the final Whole College Self-Evaluation & Quality Improvement Impact Interim Report when available; and**

- **Management to undertake a review of policies to ascertain their sufficiency in setting the framework for the use of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning.**

Mr McIlduff was thanked for his report and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

6.0   REVIEW OF HIGHER LEVEL APPRENTICESHIPS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06   Higher Level Apprenticeships Presentation.

Ms McGirr joined the meeting at this juncture.

With the aid of the PowerPoint presentation in paper 06, Ms McGirr provided an overview of Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLAs) within the College including the development strategy, the support model in place for higher level apprentices, the development of the HLA offer since their introduction in 2017, the profile of higher level apprentices, the engagement with schools and employers and the marketing strategy.

In response to questions and comments from members Ms McGirr advised of the difficulty in recruiting students to the Computing HLA due to the limited availability of relevant work placement providers in the sub-region and of the popularity of the foundation degree route in this curriculum area; explained that HLA classes with low enrolments may be combined with corresponding classes on other routes to aid efficiency; reported no concerns in relation to the quantity of and reasons for student withdrawals; advised of the positive and growing employer engagement and undertook to provide benchmarking data on this in future reports; noted the need for a robust entry process in light of the intensive nature of HLA programmes; and reported on the wraparound support put in place for higher level apprentices by academic and workplace mentors.

The Committee Chair congratulated the team for its achievements in the development of the College's HLA provision.

Ms McGirr was thanked for her report and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

7.0   ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

At the suggestion of the Committee Chair, it was agreed that the remaining meetings of the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee in 2023/24 are held in person. She also requested that questions arising from the papers are submitted for the attention of management in advance of meetings to facilitate the preparation of relevant information to members.

Ms McCartan informed the Committee of the details of a successful bid for funding for a YouthScape Plus programme under Peace Plus, valued at €7.2m, and undertook to invite members to the forthcoming launch of the programme.

ACTION: an invitation to the launch of the YouthScape Plus Programme to be extended to committee members.

8.0   REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

The Committee Chair welcomed feedback on the proceedings of the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.05 pm.

CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 31 JANUARY 2024

CHAIRPERSON _____   **DATE** 31/01/2024_____

POLICIES RECOMMENDED TO THE GOVERNING BODY FOR APPROVAL

#	Policy
1	Fitness to Practice Policy
2	Submission of Coursework Policy
3	FE Personal Tutoring & Academic Support Policy
4	Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

#	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	17/01/2024	4.1	Management to present an analysis of sub-regional skills needs when available.
2	17/01/2024	4.4	Management to present a draft Terms of Reference for a review of Special Educational Needs provision to the Committee for its endorsement.
3	17/01/2024	5.1.3	Management to report on the outcome of investigations into the below sector average enrolments from the over 25 age group.
4	17/01/2024	5.9	Management to further review the Anti-Bullying Policy for students to outline the support available to students impacted by bullying.
5	17/01/2024	5.11.1	Management to circulate the final Whole College Self-Evaluation & Quality Improvement Impact Interim Report when available.
6	17/01/2024	5.11.1	Management to undertake a review of policies to ascertain their sufficiency in setting the framework for the use of artificial intelligence in teaching and learning.
7	17/01/2024	7.0	An invitation to the launch of the YouthScape Plus Programme to be extended to committee members.