

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 2 March 2022 at 5:30 pm
in the Omagh Campus

PRESENT:

Ms Siobhan Breen
Mrs Deborah Brown
Ms Alana Jones Campbell
Ms Elaine Grier
Mrs Sandra Isherwood
Mr Colin Lewis (Interim Chief Executive)
Mrs Patricia McCaffrey
Mr Seamus McCaffrey
Ms Celine McCartan
Ms Anne McCleary (*via MS Teams / phone*)
Mrs Gillian McDowell (*via MS Teams / phone*)
Mr Michael McGuckin
Miss Caitlyn McLoughlin
Mrs Joanne Moore
Mr Gerard O'Hanlon
Dr Nicholas O'Shiel (Chairman)
Dr Lynsey Quinn (*via MS Teams / phone*)
Mr Michael Skuce

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Donna Blaney, Director of FE, DfE (*items 1.0 – 3.0 only*)
Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive (*via MS Teams / phone*)
Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body

1.0 WELCOME AND APOLOGIES

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting, extending a particular welcome to DfE's Director of Further Education, Mrs Donna Blaney.

He reminded the meeting of the Covid protocols to be observed and acknowledged the members of the Governing Body and Management Team attending virtually.

It was noted that all members were present.

2.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

3.0 DISCUSSION WITH DIRECTOR OF FURTHER EDUCATION

Dr O'Shiel expressed his gratitude to Mrs Blaney, on behalf of the Governing Body, for her support to the College in recent months and invited her to address the meeting.

Mrs Blaney began by thanking the Governing Body for the opportunity to attend the meeting and welcoming the six governors who had been appointed in January 2022. She then proceeded to provide sectoral updates as follows:

Overview of Budget Position - Mrs Blaney highlighted the budgetary pressures facing the Further Education sector. She explained that 2022/23 college budget allocations

will be derived from 2021/22 opening budgets, that the potential for in-year allocations is unknown at present and that Principals have been asked to identify where savings may be made whilst protecting frontline delivery. She also commented on the trends in increasing expenditure and declining enrolments, highlighting in particular a decline in adults enrolling for part-time courses.

10X Economic Vision and Skills for a 10X Economy Strategy - Mrs Blaney commented on colleges' role in contributing to the realization of the NI government's vision for a 10X economy and on the need for agility in the sector to enable it to deliver on the targets set out in the draft Skills Strategy. She listed the five priority clusters identified in the draft Skills Strategy and commented on the need to work in tandem with other educational institutions and to continue to focus on the needs of learners.

Review of FE Delivery Model – Mrs Blaney apprised the meeting of the Ministerial approval received for an initial phase of a review of the FE delivery model to entail a quantitative and qualitative data capturing exercise. She then detailed the timeline for this exercise, advising that it is expected that options will be presented to the Minister in late Summer, and provided assurance that no pre-determined outcome has been defined in relation to the future FE delivery model.

In response to questions and comments from members, Mrs Blaney explained that the declining enrolments referenced relate to regulated courses only and acknowledged the value of unregulated courses in providing a pathway to education for adult learners; confirmed that the promotion of STEM courses amongst females has been included in the draft Skills Strategy; advised that early conversations have taken place regarding the next generation of sectoral hubs and that there is a potential for one of these hubs to focus on green skills; apprised the meeting of the inter-departmental work underway to explore issues relating to the duplication of provision in schools and colleges and noted that this will be considered as part of the review of the FE delivery model; and re-iterated that no pre-determined outcome has been defined in relation to the future model for FE but rather options will be developed for presentation to the Minister upon the consideration of all evidence. Members also discussed the need for flexible delivery models to meet the needs of cohorts of potential learners such as the parents of primary school children.

Mrs Blaney then reflected on the issues that have arisen in South West College in the preceding year which have collectively raised concerns within the Department and commended the College's Chair, Vice Chair and Interim Chief Executive for their transparency and positive engagement with the Department on these issues. She advised that the development of a Change Management Programme, to be jointly driven by the College and the Department, had been agreed at a meeting with the Permanent Secretary and other senior departmental officials, and detailed the strands of this programme to include the appointment of independent experts to a Change Management Team and commissioning further external work relating to the findings of the investigation into the allegation of malpractice in the reporting of academic achievement as well as the findings of the review of the College's culture and structure. She acknowledged the Governing Body's commencement of a process to recruit a permanent Chief Executive as well as its decision to appoint Mr Leo Murphy to succeed Mr Lewis as Interim Chief Executive and noted her appreciation to North West Regional College for facilitating this arrangement.

In response to questions from members, Dr O'Shiel confirmed that discussions are ongoing with DfE on the appointment of a Human Resources professional to the Change Management Team and that regular communications will be issued to update staff on the progress of the Change Management Programme.

Mrs Blaney concluded her address by thanking Mr Lewis for his contribution to the College during his tenure as Interim Chief Executive.

Mrs Blaney was thanked for her attendance at the meeting and for her support to the College and withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

4.0 MINUTES OF AND MATTERS ARISING FROM A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY 2022

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 04 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 12 January 2022.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr O’Hanlon and seconded by Mrs Moore, 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.

An internet failure occurred at this juncture. Members joining virtually via the MS Teams platform were transferred to attendance via telephone.

5.0 CHAIR’S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Committee Membership.

Committee Membership – Dr O’Shiel reminded the meeting of the Governing Body’s delegation of authority to him to approve committee membership in light of the timing of the appointment of the six new governors. He explained that a process had taken place to appoint new governors to committees and drew attention to the resulting committee membership as listed in paper 05.01.

Chief Executive Recruitment – Dr O’Shiel confirmed that Clarendon Executive has been engaged to assist the Governing Body in the process to recruit a permanent Chief Executive and advised that a Project Initiation Meeting has been scheduled to take place during the week commencing 7 March 2022.

6.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01 Five Year Performance Data Analysis and Trends
- Paper 06.02 DfE Letter on 2022/23 Budget.

Performance Data Analysis and Trends – Mr Lewis explained that the slides within paper 06.01 provide a high level summary and analysis of performance data and associated trends for South West College. He highlighted the context of a challenging fiscal environment as well as the trend in declining enrolments. He cautioned that the ability of individual colleges to address declining enrolments is limited in the current policy context and that policy change at government level is required to protect the FE sector from competition from schools and universities. He suggested that a focused discussion on the challenges facing the College, as outlined in paper 06.01, should be held at a future Governing Body meeting.

2022/23 Budget – With reference to paper 06.02, Mr Lewis explained that the College has been advised to expect a 2022/23 budget allocation of £1.6m less than the 2021/22 baseline allocation and has been asked to detail how this shortfall will be managed. He commented on the insufficiency of the 2021/22 baseline budget and on the in-year allocations received to fund the gap. He also detailed the anticipated increasing financial pressures due to increases in pay costs, National Insurance Employer contributions, energy costs and inflation linked costs and advised that internal analysis has quantified the actual cut at £2.8m when additional pressures are accounted for. He apprised the meeting of the limited scope for cost savings whilst protecting curriculum provision due to the high proportion of fixed costs and reflected on his assessment of the under-resourcing of Corporate Services functions. He reported that his response to DfE had indicated that such a cut is impossible to implement and that an overspend would result if the proposed budget allocation was to remain unchanged. He then drew attention to the negative implications of such a position in relation to the regularity of the financial statements and, consequentially, the reputation of the College.

Review of FE Delivery Model – Mr Lewis informed the meeting that DfE have commissioned Tribal to conduct the data capturing exercise referred to earlier in the meeting as an initial stage in the review of the FE delivery model. He advised that this is expected to conclude in July 2022 and will inform decisions on the future shape of the sector.

ETI Inspection of College Connect Programme – Mr Lewis reported that a recent ETI inspection of the College Connect programme, a sectoral social inclusion programme led by South West College, has resulted in an award of the highest level of confidence with 21 key strengths and no areas for improvement identified. He gave an overview of the strengths identified, highlighting the value of the mentoring provided, and spoke of the achievement of this outcome given the complexity of the work involved.

Queen's Anniversary Prize – Mr Lewis apprised the meeting of the College's receipt of a Queen's Anniversary Prize for its outstanding work in environmental sustainability and spoke of the honour in being recognized for this work alongside other reputable higher and further education institutions.

A discussion then ensued during which members acknowledged the financial pressures facing the College and the need for a close examination of costs and provision; commented on the impact of historical falling birthrates on enrolments to the FE sector; highlighted the College's Unique Selling Points and the need to market these sectorally; and noted the importance of positive interactions with existing and potential students. The meeting also discussed the need for a policy intervention to address the declining enrolments to FE colleges caused by competition from schools and universities and agreed that awareness of the issues must be raised amongst government ministers and other politicians through a sector-wide lobbying campaign. Members also acknowledged the opportunity to highlight the issue through the pending consultations with Tribal and suggested that preparatory work is undertaken in this regard.

AGREED: that government ministers and other politicians are made aware of the impact of competition from schools and universities on the FE sector through a sector-wide lobbying campaign.

7.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION, QUALITY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 19 JANUARY 2022

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee held on Wednesday 19 January 2022
- Paper 07.02 HEAR and Tutorial Policy
- Paper 07.03 Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy
- Paper 07.04 Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy Covid-19 Addendum
- Paper 07.05 SWC Centre Assessment Policy 2021/22
- Paper 07.06 Policy for the Promotion of Positive Student Behaviour.

Mrs Moore, Chair of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee, began her report on the committee meeting held on 19 January 2022 by referencing the strategic updates provided to the Committee, noting that these had been covered by Mr Lewis earlier in the meeting, and adding that discussions on the recovery of student debt and marketing had also been held.

She went on to explain that a Management Report had been received by the Committee and highlighted the feedback received from student surveys, the improvements required to the course application process and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the HEAR and Tutorial Policy, the Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy, the Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy Covid-19 Addendum, the SWC Centre Assessment Policy 2021/22 and the Policy for the Promotion of Positive Student Behaviour.

Mrs Moore then referenced the presentation received on the performance and strategic plans of the Business Development Unit. She commented on the assurances provided on the attainment of key performance indicators and the contingencies in place to adapt the business model in light of the uncertainty around the availability of EU funding going forward. She also highlighted the high staff turnover rate due to concerns regarding the future stability of the Business Development unit.

Mrs Moore concluded her report by referencing the presentation received on Quality Assurance. She advised that an update had been provided on the implementation of the Quality Assurance Action Plan and welcomed the open book approach adopted to restore confidence and rebuild the College's reputation amongst Awarding Organisations.

In response to queries raised on a number of the policies recommended to the Governing Body for approval, it was agreed that the Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy be approved subject to confirmation of the regularity of the five year record retention period documented within and that the Centre Assessment Policy be reviewed further to consider suggestions made by a member.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mrs McCaffrey, adoption of the minutes of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting and approval of the HEAR & Tutorial Policy, the Safeguarding Care & Welfare Policy (subject to the confirmation requested above), the Safeguarding Care & Welfare Policy Covid-19 Addendum and the Policy for the Promotion of Positive Student Behaviour. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

8.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 FEBRUARY 2022

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 2 February 2022
- Paper 08.02 Staff Resource Report
- Paper 08.03 Fixed Term Contracts Report
- Paper 08.04 Procedure for Recruiting Permanent Posts.

In commencing her report on the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 2 February 2022, Mrs McDowell, Chair of the Staffing Committee, spoke of the update received on the Committee's key strategic issues and highlighted the need for a job evaluation process following a high level review of the College's organizational structure.

She went on to reference the Management Report received by the Committee and comment on the escalating resourcing risk within the Technical Services function due to resignations within the Technical Services team as well as the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Procedure for Recruiting Permanent Posts.

Mrs McDowell then advised that a presentation had been provided on resource planning and workforce development in the Professional and Social Sciences Faculty during which the resourcing challenges and workforce development priorities had been reported by the Head of Faculty.

Members reflected on recent technical infrastructure issues and Technical Services resourcing challenges, raised concerns regarding business continuity and contingency planning in light of the critical nature of this service and the impact of such issues on teaching and learning, and requested that the business continuity risk posed by instability in the IT infrastructure is added to the Corporate Risk Register. Mr Lewis detailed the actions taken to address the issues raised including the redeployment of academic staff to the Technical Services function, the suspension of wider development work to allow resources to be focused on immediate operational issues and the development of a short-term Technical Services Action Plan. It was suggested that a review of the job advertisements for technical posts to include gender analysis may encourage a wider applicant pool.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell, seconded by Mr Skuce, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and recommendation therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

9.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 9 FEBRUARY 2022

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on Wednesday 9 February 2022
- Paper 09.02 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 09.03 Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy
- Paper 09.04 Information Security Policy
- Paper 09.05 Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Assessment Policy.

Mrs McCaffrey, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee, acknowledged the relevance of the discussion held on the risk posed by the technical infrastructure and resourcing issues to the Audit & Risk Committee.

She then proceeded to report on the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on Wednesday 9 February 2022. Regarding Internal Audit activity, she reported that a satisfactory assurance rating had been awarded following an internal audit of Covid-19 Student Funding Initiatives, that fieldwork on the reviews of Procurement & Contract Management and Marketing & Employability Arrangements had been completed and were awaiting management responses, and that reviews of Data Protection / GDPR and the sectoral review of the Learner Management System would be undertaken in advance of the next committee meeting thereby completing the 2021/22 Internal Audit Plan. She also provided an overview of the progress made in addressing the outstanding internal audit recommendations.

Referencing the Corporate Risk Register, Mrs McCaffrey highlighted the new risks relating to student retention and failure to meet part-time FE and HE enrolment targets and explained that the Retention and Achievement Working Group has been reinstated to mitigate the former. She also spoke of the presentations received on risk management in the Centres for Excellence and the Built Environment, Creative and Life Sciences Faculty and advised that presentations may focus on 'deep dives' of specific risks rather than departmental risk registers in 2022/23. In concluding her report, Mrs McCaffrey drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Anti-Fraud and Corruption Policy, the Information Security Policy and the Penetration Testing and Vulnerability Assessment Policy.

Miss McLoughlin withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

In response to questions and comments on the grievance framework, Dr Cush explained that the Grievance Procedure is a negotiated and sectorally agreed policy. Dr Cush also undertook to reflect on comments made by a member on the presentation of the Corporate Risk Register.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McCaffrey, seconded by Ms Breen, adoption of the minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting and the recommendations therein. These minutes were subsequently digitally signed on behalf of the Chair of the Governing Body.

10.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE & GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 23 FEBRUARY 2022

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 23 February 2022
- Paper 10.02 Financial Management Report Q2 2021/22
- Paper 10.03 Credit Card Policy.

Mr McCaffrey, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, explained that the Annual PFI Contracts Review meeting with Belfast Educational Services (BES) had taken place during the 23 February 2022 committee meeting and referenced the discussion held regarding a request for a Building Fabric Survey of the Dungannon Campus.

Mr McCaffrey advised that an update on the Committee's Key Strategic Issues had been received by the Committee and that further information on the impacts of Brexit for the College had been requested. He went on to report on the likelihood of a within

budget out-turn for 2021/22, the sensitivities considered regarding student debt, the progress in the disposal of the Fairview Campus, the focus placed on the rectification of defects within the Erne Campus and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Credit Card Policy. Mr McCaffrey also referenced the presentation received on the Financial Performance of the Automotive, Computing and Engineering Faculty.

Mr O'Hanlon reflected on the lost opportunity to undertake a structural review of the Dungannon campus two years post-handover and spoke of the value of staff time and the need to ensure that such resource is used to optimal effect. He also queried the prudence of retaining staff between funding cycles and advised that an operational plan detailing projected income and expenditure for the Erne Campus in the first three of operation has been requested by the Finance & General Purposes Committee.

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.

11.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

12.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 12 Outstanding Actions.

It was noted that the development of KPIs for incorporation into the Digital Strategy has been set aside to focus on short term operational technical services issues and that the requested review of the Management of Work Based Learning in Higher Education Policy has been undertaken and will be reported to the Education, Quality & Performance Committee. A revised list of outstanding actions is included in Appendix A.

13.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

Dr O'Shiel confirmed that a communication would be issued to inform staff of the appointment of Mr Murphy to the Interim Chief Executive position.

14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

The Vice Chair commented on the value of the constructive contributions made by all governors and welcomed the contributions made by the staff governors in particular.

Ms Breen and Mrs Brown withdrew from the meeting at this juncture (8:10 pm). The meeting then went into confidential session.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 APRIL 2022

CHAIRMAN



DATE 27/04/2022

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	02/03/2022	6.0	Government ministers and other politicians to be made aware of the impact of competition from schools and universities on the FE sector through a lobbying campaign.
2	02/03/2022	8.0	The business continuity risk posed by instability in the IT infrastructure to be added to the Corporate Risk Register.