SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee**
held on Wednesday 25 October 2023 at 5.00 pm
in the Boardroom, Dungannon Campus
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PRESENT:	Mrs Deborah Brown (*via MS Teams*)
	Mrs Maureen Brunt
	Dr Frances Campbell
	Mrs Sandra Isherwood, Presiding Committee Chair
	Ms Celine McCartan, Chief Executive (*via MS Teams*)
	Ms Anne McCleary (*via MS Teams*) (*items 1.0 – 6.0 only*)
IN ATTENDANCE:	Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
	Mr Brian McIlduff, Head of Quality & Student Engagement (*item 6.3 only*)
	Mr Padraig McNamee, Director of Curriculum
APOLOGIES:	Ms Siobhan Breen
	Dr Lynsey Quinn

1.0 PRELIMINARIES

Mrs McCauley commenced the meeting by informing members of the sad news of the recent death of the Committee Chair's father. The Committee's condolences were extended to Dr Quinn on her bereavement.

Mrs McCauley then advised that Mrs Isherwood had agreed to preside over the meeting in hand in the absence of the Committee Chair at the request of the Chair of the Governing Body.

2.0 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Ms Breen and Dr Quinn.

3.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

4.0 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 17 May 2023.

There were no matters arising.

5.0 **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.

5.1 **Reduction in Full Time Student Numbers**

Ms McCartan referenced the Full Time Further Education (FE) and Full Time Higher Education (HE) enrolments listed in paper 04.02 noting the increase on 2022/23 enrolments and adding that recruitment to Traineeships, Apprenticeships and Higher Level Apprenticeships (HLA) had also increased.

She commented on the alignment of the upward trend in enrolments with the objectives of the Department for the Economy (DfE) for the FE Sector and cautioned that further significant budget cuts would impede the upward trend demonstrated.

5.2 **Student Retention**

Ms McCartan reported good retention to date and explained that the industrial action currently being taken by lecturing staff may have an adverse impact on retention going forward.

5.3 **Essential Skills**

Ms McCartan highlighted the disappointing performance in essential skills success rates and commented on the need to retain focus on this area.

5.4 **Curriculum Delivery Model**

Ms McCartan reminded the meeting that the curriculum offer is dependent on budget. She reported on the transition of some programmes to apprenticeships to optimise income and on the enforcement of minimum class sizes to ensure financial viability.

5.5 **Access to Higher Education**

Ms McCartan commented on the strong enrolments to HE and HLA Programmes.

5.6 **Quality of Teaching and Learning**

Ms McCartan provided assurances on adherence to the requirements of Awarding Organisations and on the continuous efforts to add value to the student experience.

A discussion then ensued on the most appropriate Key Strategic Issues for the Committee in the forthcoming period following which it was agreed that the Committee's Key Strategic Issues are amended to:

- Curriculum Profile

- Student Experience

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

- Review of Special Educational Needs Provision.

In response to questions and comments from members, it was noted that enrolments and retention would be captured under the Curriculum Profile key strategic issue as would the potential discontinuation of support by Awarding Organisations for traditional FE awards used in Northern Ireland arising from the introduction of T Levels in England.

AGREED: that the Committee's Key Strategic Issues are amended to:

- **Curriculum Profile**

- **Student Experience**

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

- **Review of Special Educational Needs Provision.**

6.0   MANAGEMENT REPORT

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05   Management Report
- Paper 05.01   2022/23 College Development Plan Outcomes
- Paper 05.02   Timetabling Operational Procedures 2023/24
- Paper 05.03   Average Class Size
- Paper 05.04   CEA Regulation Report on the Evaluation of the L3 Advanced Technical Award
- Paper 05.05   OCR Post 16 Level 3 Qualification Reform Guide
- Paper 05.06   Strategic Alliance Group Curriculum Workstream
- Paper 05.07   Sector Retention, Achievement & Success Performance 2017-2022
- Paper 05.08   Whole College Quality Improvement Plan
- Paper 05.09   National Student Survey Results
- Paper 05.10   Business Development Unit Report
- Paper 05.11   Report on Externally Funded Projects
- Paper 05.12   Connected 4 Update Report
- Paper 05.13   Curriculum Projects List.

6.1   College Outcomes

Ref: Management Report Section 1.1 and Papers 05.01, 05.02 & 05.03

Mr McNamee highlighted the satisfactory 2022/23 enrolment performance outcomes illustrated in section 1.1 of paper 05 noting the popularity of Apprenticeship and HLA Programmes.

He then drew attention to the 2023/24 enrolments to date commenting on the increase in enrolments to Full Time FE, Full Time HE, Traineeships and HLAs, the steady Entitlement Framework enrolments, the reclassification of some non-employed apprentices as trainees and the continuing challenge arising from competition from universities.

Mr McNamee also referenced the increased average class size, apprised the meeting of planned workshops for school pupils to raise awareness of the College's offering and spoke of the difficulty in meeting the growing demand for classroom learning support.

In response to questions and comments from members, Mr McNamee commented on the limitations of the Cyber Essentials accreditation in terms of remote access to specialist software, advised of the planned investigation to identify the reasons for the underperformance in Essential Skills and undertook to explore issues potentially faced by students participating in cross border projects. He also undertook to consider suggestions

regarding the transfer of information on student support requirements from schools and the recruitment of learning support staff with previous working relationships with students.

Ms McCartan commented on the need for policy change in post 16 education to remove the competition between educational institutions, on the comparison made between school teachers and FE lecturers in the industrial dispute and on the College's evidenced increased enrolments in alignment with DfE's objective for the sector.

6.2   Curriculum Developments

Ref: Management Report Section 1.2 and Papers 05.04, 05.05 & 05.06

Mr McNamee apprised the meeting of the opportunities presented by the introduction of All Age Apprenticeships, of the positive feedback received, both from students and CEA, on the new Advanced Technicals award, on the need to consider implications of the potential discontinuation of support by Awarding Organisations for traditional FE awards used in Northern Ireland and of the area based approach being explored under the Strategic Alliance to deliver programmes that may be unviable in standalone colleges.

6.3   Quality Assurance

Mr McIlduff joined the meeting for this item.

6.3.1   Performance Outcomes

Ref: Management Report Section 2.1 and Paper 05.07

With reference to the Retention, Achievement and Success rates provided in the Management Report, Mr McIlduff commented on the evidenced dip in 2022/23 performance from comparative 2021/22 figures. He noted in particular the disappointing Essential Skills achievement rates and ESOL retention rates and reported on the amended approaches adopted in a bid to generate improvements in these areas as well as the focus to be placed on the quality of teaching and the accuracy of data.

6.3.2   Report on 2022-2024 Quality Improvement Plan

Ref: Management Report Section 2.2 and Paper 05.08

Mr McIlduff provided an overview of the progress made in the implementation of actions identified under the eight areas for improvement in the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2022-24 and explained that a further review of progress will be undertaken in November 2023.

In response to questions and comments from members, Mr McIlduff undertook to consider adding a RAG status to the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan Progress Report, noted the correlation between areas for improvement and corporate risks, and highlighted the effect of low achievement rates in Essential Skills ICT on success rates in the School of Mathematics and Computing.

6.3.3   Student Support

Ref: Management Report Section 2.3

Mr McIlduff reported on the scope and scale of support provided to students.

Mrs Brown commented on the commitment of staff to supporting students.

6.3.4   Student Feedback

Ref: Management Report Section 2.4 and Paper 05.09

Mr McIlduff reported on the positive feedback received from South West College students in the National Student Survey as detailed in paper 05.09.

6.3.5   Teaching & Learning

Ref: Management Report Section 2.5

Mr McIlduff appraised the meeting of the lost learning impact of the industrial action underway by lecturers and of the receipt of complaints by students. He also commented on the value of Project Based Learning activities and the planned launch of a new Teaching Reflection Model at the forthcoming Curriculum Conference.

Responding to questions and comments from members, management highlighted the informal nature of the new Teaching Reflection Model, acknowledged the possibility of setting specific areas for reflection during the year as well as the possibility of reporting student feedback at a school level alongside retention, achievement and success, and provided assurances on the efforts made to mitigate the impact of lost learning.

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

6.4   **Business Development**

Ref: Management Report Section 3.0 and Papers 05.10, 05.11 & 05.12

Mr McNamee referenced the reports provided on business development activity, highlighting the planned student mobilities under the Erasmus and Turing schemes.

6.5   **Social Inclusion**

Ref: Management Report Section 4.0

Mr McNamee reported on the commencement of two new social inclusion programmes and noted the outcome dependant nature of the funding offered for these initiatives. He commented on the College's strong track record in the delivery of such programmes as well as on the experienced team in place.

6.6   **Strategic Partnerships**

Ref: Management Report Section 5.0

Mr McNamee made the Committee aware of the College's partnership with the Nerve Centre. He also spoke of the reduced demand for community provision due to the change to a cost recovery pricing strategy and explained that some provision may be funded under the REAP programme.

6.7   **Resourcing**

Ref: Management Report Section 6.0

Mr McNamee apprised the meeting of the challenges in providing cover for staff absences as well as of the progress in implementing the requirements of the Cyber Essentials accreditation.

6.8   **Events and PR**

Ref: Management Report Section 7.0

Mr McNamee outlined the benefits of the new Marketing Dashboard in evaluating the impact of marketing initiatives.

6.9   **Curriculum Projects**

Ref: Management Report Section 8.0 and Paper 05.13

Mr McNamee drew attention to the list of curriculum projects in paper 05.13.

6.10   **Risks**

Ref: Management Report Section 9.0

Referring to section 9.0 of the Management Report, Mr McNamee outlined the risks to the successful delivery of a quality curriculum and student experience.

6.11   **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.

Ms McCleary withdrew from the meeting at this juncture.

7.0   **REVIEW OF THE CURRICULUM & QUALITY ASSURANCE COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06.01   Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference
- Paper 06.02   Proposed Amendments to Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference.

The Secretary to the Governing Body drew attention to the minor amendment proposed to the Committee's Terms of Reference to allow greater scope for the attendance of members of the management team at committee meetings where required.

ACTION: that the Curriculum & Quality Assurance Committee Terms of Reference is recommended to the Governing Body for approval.

8.0   **PROGRAMME OF BUSINESS 2023/24**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07   Programme of Business 2023/24.

AGREED: acceptance of the proposed Programme of Business.

9.0   ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

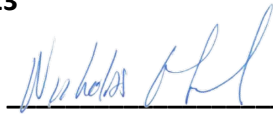No further business was raised.

10.0   REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members commended Mrs Isherwood for effectively presiding over the meeting in the absence of the Committee Chair.

The meeting concluded at 6.35 pm.

CONFIRMED AND ADOPTED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 15 NOVEMBER 2023

CHAIRMAN   _____   **DATE** 15/11/2023