

## SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**  
held on Wednesday 13 January 2021 at 5:30 pm  
via Microsoft Teams

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**PRESENT:**

- Mr Peter Archdale
- Ms Siobhan Breen
- Mrs Deborah Brown
- 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 (Chairman)
- Mr Michael Skuce
- Miss Clara Jane Whitley

**IN ATTENDANCE:**

- Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive
- Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
- Ms Tracey McElroy, Boardroom Apprentice

### **1.0 PRELIMINARIES**

In commencing the meeting Dr O'Shiel, Chair of the Governing Body, welcomed all present. He noted that the College faces challenges in the context of Covid-19 but that it is in a good position overall and that a comprehensive update on operations would be provided by Mr McAlister during the meeting.

### **2.0 APOLOGIES**

It was noted that all members were present.

### **3.0 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS**

No conflict of interest declarations were made.

### **4.0 MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON WEDNESDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2020**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 11 November 2020.

Mrs McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body, undertook to correct a number of typographical errors highlighted by a member.

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

## **5.0 CHAIR’S BUSINESS**

**Staff Acknowledgement** - Dr O’Shiel acknowledged the work of staff in all areas of the College and thanked them for their continued efforts in these extraordinary times.

**Digital Skills Training** - Dr O’Shiel referred to a suggestion at an earlier meeting that digital skills training may be useful for governors and asked members to contact the Secretary to the Governing Body if they have any training needs in this or any other area. At the suggestion of a member, Mrs McCauley undertook to investigate the possibility of storing papers for Governing Body and committee meetings on Microsoft Teams.

**Minute Taking** – Dr O’Shiel explained that due to workload pressures cover arrangements may, on occasion, be put in place to attend and record minutes of committee meetings.

**Governing Body Self-Assessment** – Dr O’Shiel reminded the meeting that an analysis of the Governing Body’s 2019/20 self-assessment had been circulated in November 2020. He noted that the responses had been generally positive and invited members to submit comments, recommendations or feedback on any aspect of Governing Body business to him through the Secretary to the Governing Body.

**Extensions to Terms of Office** – Dr O’Shiel thanked relevant governors for accepting extensions to their terms of office until July 2021. He then reported that a sectoral governor recruitment campaign would be launched by DfE in the coming months which would enable the appointment of new governors prior to the 2021/22 academic year. In response to a comment on the continuity issue arising from the simultaneous loss of five governors, it was noted that this issue had been raised with DfE.

## **6.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 05.01 Assurance Statement for Safe Resumption.

**Assurance Statement for the Safe Resumption of On-Site Educational Provision and Related Activity** – With reference to the assurance statement in paper 05.01, Mr McAlister explained that the receipt of additional funding from DfE to cover the costs incurred by the College due to the Covid-19 pandemic enables full assurance to be provided on the College’s financial position as well as on its operational readiness. Mr McGuckin commented on the comfort provided to governors by the assurance

statement and thanked Mr McAlister and his staff for their work in enabling the safe resumption of college services.

**Covid-19 Implications** – Mr McAlister reported that 33 staff and 80 learners had reported positive Covid-19 diagnoses since 1<sup>st</sup> September 2020. He noted that the most recent monthly statistics had shown more diagnoses of staff than learners and surmised that this may be due to a lack of reporting by learners as they continue to engage remotely. He also advised that all campuses are closed, with staff and students working remotely and access provided only in exceptional and essential circumstances.

**Funding** – Mr McAlister informed members of changes to the college budget as a result of the January Monitoring Round as well as of additional funds received from DfE for Minor Works and IT equipment, with the latter to be used to support staff and students with remote learning. He also advised that business cases have been developed, which may be submitted to DfE at short notice should additional funding become available before the year end.

**January Examinations** – Mr McAlister confirmed that all January 2021 examinations within the sector have been either postponed or cancelled. In response to questions from members, the meeting was made aware of the engagements with awarding bodies and of the mitigations put in place by curriculum teams to ensure that qualifications can be awarded in the event of exam cancellations.

**Annual Accountability Review Meeting** – Mr McAlister advised that the Annual Accountability Review meeting with DfE is scheduled to take place on Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021 and provided an overview of the areas to be covered.

**International Activity** – Mr McAlister made the meeting aware of the discontinuation of Erasmus for FE students following Brexit. Members expressed disappointment in this development and suggested that this matter be considered at the next Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting along with other Brexit impacts. Mr McAlister also informed the meeting of a potential opportunity to deliver degree top-up programmes to Chinese diploma graduates.

## **7.0 ERNE CAMPUS PROJECT UPDATE**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 06 Erne Campus Report.

Mr McAlister confirmed that the D2A agreement has been signed both by the College and the Integrated Supply Team (IST) which enables an open book assessment of the additional costs claimed by the IST as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. He added that the Project Board meeting scheduled for 18<sup>th</sup> December 2020 had been cancelled to dedicate resource to this task and that the next Project Board meeting will take place in late January 2021.

Mr McAlister provided assurance that the budget for the development is on target and that some funding has been committed by DfE to cover the additional costs incurred as a result of the pandemic. He explained that the IST is working towards a completion date in late February 2021 and that work is progressing on decant plans. He then provided details of two non-adversarial Early Warning Notices issued by the College to the Integrated Consultancy Team (ICT). In response to a query from a member

regarding resources on-site, Mr McAlister explained that the Early Warning Notices had been issued with the aim of avoiding further delays in completion

Mr McAlister also informed the meeting of plans to hold an externally facilitated multi-agency workshop focusing on optimal utilization of the Erne Campus asset and marketing thereof; commented on the value of the support provided by Southern Regional College's Project Director; noted the preparations underway for the Gateway 4 Review scheduled to take place in March 2021; and advised that the issue of costs associated with rock excavation remains outstanding and that solicitors have been engaged by both parties with the aim of reaching a resolution on this matter.

In response to a question on the continuation of Building Information Modelling (BIM) on the campus, Mr McAlister confirmed that building management, including associated resourcing and BIM, would be considered at the forthcoming workshop.

## **8.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION, QUALITY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 25 NOVEMBER 2020**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee held on Wednesday 25 November 2020
- Paper 07.02 Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy.

In commencing her report of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting held on Wednesday 25 November 2020, the Committee Chair, Mrs Moore, provided an overview of discussions held on strategic matters including Covid-19 diagnoses amongst staff and learners, the training provided by the College to ETI in the area of online pedagogy, student safeguarding, and the College's performance in the National Student Survey and the Further Education Leavers' Survey.

Regarding the Management Report delivered to the Committee, Mrs Moore highlighted the effect of the College's engagement with employers in reducing the number of furloughed apprentices, the support provided to staff and students to enhance the effectiveness of online learning, the challenge in meeting part-time further education targets in the current environment and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Quality Assurance & Improvement Policy.

Mrs Moore also referred to the presentation received by the Committee on the performance and strategic plans of the Automotive, Computing and Engineering Faculty. She drew attention to the medium to long term objectives for the faculty as listed in the minutes as well as the discussions held on promoting self-employment amongst students and the challenges encountered in recruiting to certain academic positions due to external competition.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mrs Martin, adoption of the minutes of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee meeting and the 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 STAFFING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 2 DECEMBER 2020**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 2 December 2020
- Paper 08.02 Staff Resource Report
- Paper 08.03 Fixed Term Contracts Report
- Paper 08.04 Recruitment & Selection Policy
- Paper 08.05 Carers' Policy
- Paper 08.06 Access NI Policy Statement.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 2 December 2020, Mrs McDowell, Chair of the Staffing Committee, highlighted the updates received from Management on Covid-19 cases amongst staff and learners, the consultation on DfE's new skills strategy, the College of the Future Commission, the difficulties encountered in recruiting to some specialized areas, and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Recruitment & Selection Policy, the Carers' Policy and the Access NI Policy Statement.

With reference to the presentation received by the Committee on resource planning and workforce development in the Automotive, Computing and Engineering Faculty at its October 2020 meeting, Mrs McDowell explained that an update report had been received from the Head of Faculty detailing the progress made in implementing the initiatives proposed including the extension of the appraisal process, the adoption of a longer-term strategic approach to resourcing and the provision of peer mentors.

Mrs McDowell also referenced the presentation received on resource planning and workforce development in the Business Development section and drew attention to the overview provided on the performance of ongoing projects, the curriculum delivered by the Business Development team and the value of industry engagement to staff development and curriculum planning.

**AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell, seconded by Mrs McCaffrey, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and the recommendation 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 16 DECEMBER 2020**

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 16 December 2020
- Paper 09.02 Investment Policy
- Paper 09.03 Bad Debt Policy
- Paper 09.04 Petty Cash & Float Policy
- Paper 09.05 Fees & Charges Policy 2021/22.

Mr McCaffrey, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, explained that comprehensive updates had been provided at the 16<sup>th</sup> December 2020 meeting on the Committee's key strategic issues. Referring to the Management Report, he highlighted the issue discussed on the difficulty in allocating the entirety of the Student Hardship Fund due to its stringent eligibility criteria as well as the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Investment Policy, Bad Debt Policy, Petty Cash & Float Policy and Fees & Charges Policy 2021/22.

Mr McCaffrey also explained that the College's connections with industry had been one of the key messages emanating from the presentation received on the financial performance of the Built Environment, Creative & Life Sciences Faculty.

A brief discussion then ensued during which members commented on the loss of momentum on the Social Bond proposal and were advised of the plans to engage with elected representatives on the economic benefits of the Social Bond concept at an appropriate juncture. It was suggested that large companies may be approached to contribute to the project and it was acknowledged that government support must be in place in advance of any such approaches.

Referring to the Management Report, Mrs McCaffrey congratulated staff for their achievement in finalizing the Annual Report & Financial Statements 2019/20 and resolving the issue raised by the external auditors on the accounting treatment of the Fairview campus.

**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 recommendations therein. 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 declared a small gift received from the Open University and undertook to record this in the Register of Hospitality & Gifts.

#### **12.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS**

No further business was raised.

#### **13.0 REVIEW OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS**

It was noted that an update had been provided on the Erne Campus Marketing Plan as requested. A revised list of actions is appended in Annex A.

#### **14.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING**

Feedback was sought on the proceedings of the meeting and no issues were raised.

*The Staff and Student Governors along with the Boardroom Apprentice withdrew from the meeting at this juncture. The meeting then went into confidential session and concluded at 8:10 pm.*

**CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 MARCH 2021**

**CHAIRMAN** \_\_\_\_\_

**DATE** \_\_\_\_\_

## SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	16/09/2020	5.6	An update of the current status of the College Development Plan is to be presented to the Governing Body later in the year.
2	13/01/2021	5.0	Mrs McCauley to investigate the possibility of storing papers for Governing Body and committee meetings on Microsoft Teams.
3	13/01/2021	6.0	Access to Erasmus and other Brexit impacts to be considered at the next meeting of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee.