

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a meeting of the **Governing Body of South West College**
held on Wednesday 17 November 2021 at 5:30 pm
via Microsoft Teams

PRESENT:

- Mr Peter Archdale
- Ms Siobhan Breen
- Mrs Deborah Brown
- Mr Colin Lewis (Interim Chief Executive)
- Mrs Margaret Martin
- Mrs Patricia McCaffrey
- Mrs Gillian McDowell
- Mrs Monica McGeary
- Mr Michael McGuckin
- Miss Caitlyn McLoughlin
- Mrs Joanne Moore
- Mr Gerard O'Hanlon
- Dr Nicholas O'Shiel (Chairman)
- Mr Michael Skuce

IN ATTENDANCE:

- Dr Jill Cush, Deputy Chief Executive
- Mrs Fiona McCauley, Secretary to the Governing Body
- Mr Mark Sterritt, Boardroom Apprentice

APOLOGIES: Mr Seamus McCaffrey

1.0 PRELIMINARIES

Dr O'Shiel welcomed all present to the meeting. He extended a particular welcome to Miss McLoughlin, student governor, and Mr Lewis, Interim Chief Executive, on their first attendance at a Governing Body meeting.

Dr O'Shiel acknowledged that the term of office for five governors comes to an end on 31 December 2021 and that the current meeting may therefore be the last for Mr Archdale, Mrs Martin, Mrs McGeary, Mr O'Hanlon and Mr Skuce.

2.0 APOLOGIES

Apologies were tendered on behalf of Mr McCaffrey.

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 8 SEPTEMBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 03 Minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 8 September 2021.

Minute Reference 17.0

Dr O'Shiel informed the meeting of the intention to issue a communication to staff to provide an update on the findings of the culture and structure review.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McCaffrey and seconded by Mr Skuce, 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

Online Meeting Etiquette – Dr O'Shiel requested that members use the 'raise hand' feature of MS Teams to indicate their wish to make a contribution to discussions.

Period of Change – Dr O'Shiel reflected on the changes in the College's operating environment both internally and externally and commented on the need for good communication during this period.

Governing Body Focus – Dr O'Shiel asked members to retain focus on students, staff and the curriculum.

New Governors – Dr O'Shiel reported that DfE expects to appoint new members to the Governing Body with effect from 1 January 2022. He advised that he had highlighted the concerns previously raised by members regarding the simultaneous loss of five governors and that DfE will consider whether a staggered transition would be appropriate.

Appreciation to Governors - Dr O'Shiel recorded his appreciation to Mr Archdale, Mrs Martin, Mrs McGeary, Mr O'Hanlon and Mr Skuce for their contribution to the Governing Body during their ten years of service.

Appreciation to the Secretary to the Governing Body – Dr O'Shiel acknowledged the increased number of meetings held in recent months and thanked the Secretary to the Governing Body for facilitating these meetings.

6.0 CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

Covid-19 Recovery and Resilience – Mr Lewis reported that 111 staff and 202 students had been diagnosed with Covid-19 since 1 September 2021 and commented on the management of specific challenges on campus. He noted the increase in infection rates nationwide and the related possibility of enhanced restrictions.

Student Support – Mr Lewis confirmed that additional support is being provided to students impacted by the Covid-19 restrictions in place in 2020/21 to enable them to complete their programmes of study. He detailed the specific interventions in place and advised that these are funded by DfE through its Lost Learning Fund.

Quality of Teaching and Learning – Mr Lewis explained that verbal feedback received following an ETI inspection of the Engineering Hub has been highly complementary. He also explained that a Whole College Periodic Review is underway to assess the strengths, areas for development, and challenges faced by academic teams and added that a Quality Assurance Action Plan has been developed to ensure compliance with the requirements of Awarding Organisations.

Curriculum and Future Delivery – Mr Lewis informed members that a review of the FE delivery model, commissioned by DfE, has commenced which will inform options for a new delivery model. He reported on continued indications of a sectoral decline in full-

time enrolments, noting South West College's modest 8.6% share of the overall sectoral decline. He also made the meeting aware of the focus on staff resilience, sustainability and Project Based Learning at the recent Curriculum Conference.

Safeguarding – Mr Lewis commented on the vital role played by the Safeguarding team and on the pressure associated with the role, and advised that it is proposed that professional supervision is provided to support the team to manage their personal response to safeguarding incidents.

Engagement with Stakeholders – Mr Lewis explained that a meeting had been held with a number of Fermanagh & Omagh District Council members and officials and that biannual meetings have been agreed going forward to share information and stimulate partnership working.

Corporate Governance, Accountability & Assurance – Mr Lewis re-iterated the intention to issue a communication to staff later in the week to provide an update on the findings of the culture and structure review. He reported the strong likelihood of the receipt of an unqualified audit opinion, with no material misstatements identified, by the Comptroller and Auditor General following the audit of the 2020/21 Annual Report & Financial Statements.

Peace Plus Funding Proposal – Mr Lewis informed the Governing Body of the development of an application for funding, in conjunction with Mayo, Sligo and Leitrim Education and Training Boards, for a project focused on modern methods of construction.

Rural Economic Accelerator Programme – Mr Lewis reported that approval in principle has been awarded for the Rural Economic Accelerator Programme, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast and Southern Regional College, funded through the UK Community Renewal Fund, which aims to create a sustainable and prosperous Mid South West region and contribute to local economic development and the UK government's net zero targets.

On conclusion of Mr Lewis' updates, members welcomed the development of the Quality Assurance Action Plan, noted the College's role in lobbying for a proportionate allocation of the government funds made available for SMEs to businesses in the region, and agreed that assurance statements should be reviewed by the Audit & Risk Committee prior to their submission to DfE. Dr Cush also commented on the highlights and benefits of the College's participation at the COP26 Climate Change Conference and undertook to evaluate the outcomes for the College.

7.0 ERNE CAMPUS DEVELOPMENT UPDATE

Mr Lewis spoke of the College's participation at the COP26 Climate Change Conference and informed the meeting of the media interest in the Erne Campus following this event.

He then referenced the Capital Projects Steering Committee meeting held earlier in the day, at which he reported that the Erne Project will be delivered on-time and within budget, and explained that the Gateway 5 review will take place in March 2022 which will focus on operations and benefits realization.

He also commented on the resourcing of the Estates Team and on the need to ensure that any future capital projects receive sufficient recurrent funding to cover resource and running costs.

In response to a question on the viability of the College's Centre for Renewable Energy & Sustainable Technology (CREST), Dr Cush explained that she expects the building to

continue to be fully utilized in light of the focus on skills for a more sustainable economy in DfE's Economic Recovery Action Plan. It was noted that all college assets should be continually assessed to ensure that their potential is realized.

8.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 21 SEPTEMBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 07.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on Tuesday 21 September 2021
- Paper 07.02 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 07.03 Bribery Act Policy
- Paper 07.04 Special Category Data Appropriate Policy Document
- Paper 07.05 Freedom of Information Publication Scheme
- Paper 07.06 Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

Reporting on the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on Tuesday 21 September 2021, the Committee Chair, Mrs McCaffrey, explained that a satisfactory assurance rating had been awarded by the Internal Auditors in respect of the system of governance, risk management and control in place in 2020/21 and drew attention to the internal audit plan for 2021/22.

Providing an update on fraud, she explained that no fraud had occurred as a result of the cyber incident in March 2021 as no data had been exfiltrated and no payments were made. She advised that procedures for handling bank account change requests had been reviewed following a phishing incident in which the salary of a member of staff had been re-directed.

Moving on to the Management Report received by the Committee, Mrs McCaffrey highlighted the alignment of the most serious risks faced by the College with the top three global business risks, the resourcing pressures within the Technical Services team, the Committee's approval for the submission of the Annual Report & Financial Statements for audit, the £21k written off in 2020/21 relating mainly to student debt, and the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Bribery Act Policy, the Special Category Data Appropriate Policy Document and the Freedom of Information Publication Scheme.

She also referred to the presentations received on risk management in the Finance and Human Resources departments, highlighting the risks relating to increased student bad debt due to affordability issues, the failure to recruit staff and the failure to safeguard staff wellbeing.

Mrs McCaffrey concluded by referencing the Committee's recommendation for adoption of the revised Audit & Risk Committee Terms of Reference.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McCaffrey, seconded by Mrs Moore, 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.

9.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 29 SEPTEMBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 08.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 29 September 2021
- Paper 08.02 Staff Resource Report
- Paper 08.03 Fixed Term Contracts Report
- Paper 08.04 Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy
- Paper 08.05 Dignity at Work Policy
- Paper 08.06 Staffing Committee Terms of Reference.

Reporting on the Staffing Committee meeting held on Wednesday 29 September 2021, Mrs McDowell, Chair of the Staffing Committee, drew attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Health, Safety & Wellbeing Policy, the Dignity at Work Policy and the revised Staffing Committee Terms of Reference, as well as the Chair of the Governing Body's ratification of the appointments, staff requests and fixed term-contract proposals as outlined in the minutes.

She referred to the presentation received on resource planning and workforce development in the Automotive, Computing and Engineering faculty and advised that the Committee had been reminded of the sectoral challenges encountered in recruiting staff to particular curricular areas and made aware of the mitigating actions proposed by the Head of Faculty.

She explained that a presentation of the College's Raising a Concern framework had also been received, during which an overview of the functionality of the new Work In Confidence platform had been provided which enables staff to anonymously raise concerns through an electronic device.

Regarding the proposals made by the Head of Faculty during his presentation to the Committee, it was noted that sectoral parameters stymie the full implementation of these proposals and that an agreement in the lecturers' pay negotiations may elicit progress in addressing the challenges faced.

Mr Lewis raised a wider issue concerning staffing levels, pay levels and job evaluations in the College's business support functions. He commented on the resulting negative impact on staff morale and undertook to investigate further actions required.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs McDowell, seconded by Mr Skuce, adoption of the minutes of the Staffing Committee meeting and 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 13 OCTOBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 09.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 October 2021
- Paper 09.02 Financial Management Report 2020/21
- Paper 09.03 Petty Cash & Float Policy
- Paper 09.04 Financial Scheme of Delegation Policy & Procedure
- Paper 09.05 Procurement Policy
- Paper 09.06 Fees & Charges Policy 2021/22

- Paper 09.07 Credit Control & Debt Management Policy
- Paper 09.08 Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference.

In the absence of Mr McCaffrey, Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, Mr McGuckin provided a report on the committee meeting held on Wednesday 13 October 2021.

He advised that an update paper on the implications of Brexit for the College had been requested for the next meeting, that the irregular pattern of income and expenditure in 2020/21 due to pandemic implications had been highlighted, and that a positive report had been received on the financial performance of the Professional & Social Sciences faculty. He went on to highlight the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Petty Cash & Float Policy, the Financial Scheme of Delegation Policy & Procedure, the Procurement Policy, the revised Fees & Charges Policy 2021/22, the Credit Control & Debt Management Policy and the Finance & General Purposes Committee Terms of Reference. He also commented on the Committee's scrutiny of the One Planet Living initiative and on the Committee's recommendation for Governing Body approval for the submission of an application to Bioregional for One Planet Living leadership status.

In response to a query regarding the staffing required to resource the One Planet Living action plan, Dr Cush reminded the meeting that an estates team restructure had been approved including the creation of new posts and the mainstreaming of resources within the Erne Project Team.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr McGuckin, seconded by Mrs McCaffrey, 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 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION, QUALITY & PERFORMANCE COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 20 OCTOBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 10.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee held on Wednesday 20 October 2021
- Paper 10.02 2021/22 College Development Plan
- Paper 10.03 Higher Education Academic Assessment Appeals Policy & Procedure
- Paper 10.04 Plagiarism Policy
- Paper 10.05 Learning Support Policy
- Paper 10.06 Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information Policy & Process
- Paper 10.07 Policy for Students with Caring Responsibilities
- Paper 10.08 Education, Quality & Performance Committee Terms of Reference.

Mrs Moore, Chair of the Education, Quality & Performance Committee, began her report on the committee meeting held on 20 October 2021 by confirming the Committee's scrutiny of the 2021/22 College Development Plan and referencing the final version provided.

She went on to provide an overview of the updates received on the Committee's key strategic issues and outline the emerging educational strategic issues presented. She

highlighted the discussion held on the impact of the degree program offered by MEGA and the request for more detailed information on safeguarding referrals.

Mrs Moore then commented on the presentation received on the performance and strategic plans of the Centres for Excellence, noting in particular the additional workload demands placed on the Digital Services team to support the transition to remote curriculum delivery and remote working.

She concluded by drawing attention to the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Higher Education Academic Assessment Appeals Policy & Procedure, the Plagiarism Policy, the Learning Support Policy, the Accuracy and Completeness of Published Information Policy & Process and the Policy for Students with Caring Responsibilities as well as its recommendation for adoption of the revised Education, Quality & Performance Committee Terms of Reference.

Members then commented on the importance of an effective Safeguarding Policy and on the importance of maintaining focus on curriculum design regardless of the mode of delivery.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Moore, seconded by Mrs Martin, 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.

12.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 10 NOVEMBER 2021

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED to all members:

- Paper 11.01 Minutes of a meeting of the Audit & Risk Committee held on Wednesday 10 November 2021
- Paper 11.02 Annual Report & Financial Statements 2020/21
- Paper 11.03 Report to Those Charged with Governance
- Paper 11.04 Corporate Risk Register
- Paper 11.05 Corporate Risk Register Review Report
- Paper 11.06 Freedom to Speak Up : Raising a Concern Policy
- Paper 11.07 Audit Committee Annual Report.

In presenting his report of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on Wednesday 10 November 2021, Mr Skuce, who had presided over the meeting, began by welcoming the unqualified audit opinion received on the 2020/21 Annual Report & Financial Statements and confirming the Committee's review of the Report to Those Charged with Governance.

Regarding the update received from the Internal Auditor, he advised that a satisfactory assurance rating had been awarded following an internal audit review of Human Resources and that a review of the administration of DfE's Covid-19 student funding initiatives is underway. He noted that the appraisal process was reportedly behind schedule and that a discussion was held on the importance of maintaining focus on this process.

Mr Skuce went on to list the two new risks added to the Corporate Risk Register; comment on the resourcing challenges within the Technical Services team; draw attention to the Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report; highlight the Committee's recommendation for approval of the Freedom to Speak Up: Raising a Concern policy; and report that an update had been provided on the Raising a Concern framework,

noting that consideration will be given to the independence of the Raising a Concern Champion role. He also advised that updates had been provided on risk management in the Erne Project, the Services department and the Professional & Social Sciences faculty.

The Committee Chair, Mrs McCaffrey, extended her congratulations to the Finance team on its achievement in receiving an unqualified audit opinion with no adjustments and no audit recommendations. Mr Lewis undertook to convey the Governing Body's congratulations to the team.

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

13.0 DECLARATION OF HOSPITALITY OR GIFTS RECEIVED OR OFFERED

No declarations were made under this heading.

14.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

No further business was raised.

15.0 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members noted their satisfaction with the proceedings of the meeting.

Ms Breen, Mrs Brown, Miss McLoughlin and Mr Sterritt withdrew from the meeting at this juncture (6:55 pm). The meeting then went into confidential session.

CONFIRMED BY THE GOVERNING BODY AT A MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 JANUARY 2022

CHAIRMAN _____

DATE _____

SUMMARY OF OUTSTANDING ACTIONS

	Meeting Date	Minute Ref	Action
1	17/11/2021	6.0	Dr Cush to provide an evaluation of the outcomes for the College of its participation in the COP26 Climate Change Conference.