MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE EDUCATION COMMITTEE OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD ON TUESDAY 19 MAY AT 17.30 via TEAMs

Present:
Mr Stuart Harper (Chair)
Mrs Lee Campbell (Principal / Chief Executive)
Dr Thomas Moore (Governing Body Chair)
Dr Liz Finnigan
Ms Celine Maria Corhea

In Attendance:
Ms Libby Shackels, Director of Curriculum
Mrs Elaine Nesbitt (Acting Assistant Director HE and Quality)
Mrs Fiona Bradley (Assistant Director FE and Training)
Mrs Lorriane McKeown (Assistant Director of Student Services and Marketing)
Mrs Emma Foster, Secretary to the Governing Body

Apologies: Mrs Hilary Singleton and Mrs Angela Whiteside

The meeting convened at 17.31 pm.

ACTION BY WHOM

A01. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Mrs Singleton and Mrs Whiteside.

The Chair expressed condolences to Mrs Whiteside following the recent death of her husband. A card has been sent by Mrs Foster on behalf of the Governing Body to Mrs Whiteside.

A02. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the commencement of the meeting interests held in any matter to be discussed. No interests were declared.

A03. MINUTES OF THE MEETING 24 MARCH 2026

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 March 2026 were reviewed for accuracy and approved, subject to minor amendments suggested by Dr Moore and Dr Finnigan. The minutes were approved by Dr Moore and seconded by Dr Finnigan.

A04. MATTERS ARISING

The Chair noted the outstanding actions on the action log.

Ms Shackels informed members that sector Principals had agreed to establish a Digital Innovation Working Group to oversee a range of initiatives relating to AI and Canvas, with a focus on both students and staff.

Going forward, a standing agenda item providing an update on Artificial Intelligence (AI) will be added to the committees' agendas.

A recent internal audit was carried out in relation to performance data of the college, and the resulting report was positive.

A05. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

Nothing to note.

A06. FE FIT FOR FUTURE UPDATE

The Chair attended a meeting on 21 April 2026 with representatives from the Department and members of the Governing Body to discuss the "Fit for the Future" initiative and the Department's intended outcomes.

It was noted that one of the key aims of the initiative is to increase learner numbers, particularly among adult groups that are currently underrepresented. Members were advised that the Department for Economy's Minister is leading the initiative.

Dr Moore also updated members on a meeting he attended with the Department the previous day. He advised that the four key constructs of the reform, curriculum, performance, budgets, and governance and collaboration were discussed. He further noted that a number of working groups have been established to progress work in each of these areas.

Work on FE reform remains ongoing, and it was agreed that "Fit for the Future" will become a standing item on future Governing Body agendas to ensure members are kept updated on developments. Members were also advised that Dr Moore has requested the development of a common portal site to enable governors and staff access to information and monitor the progress of the work being undertaken in this area.

Ms Shackels left the meeting at 17.56.

A07. SAFEGUARDING UPDATE

Mrs McKeown provided members with a verbal update on safeguarding. She advised that there has been a noticeable increase in both the complexity of cases and the manner in which concerns are being presented. Most cases are initially identified by frontline support staff or lecturers, with all concerns being formally recorded.

Members were informed that the College currently has 15 trained safeguarding officers, and that each concern is referred to Mrs McKeown in her role as Designated Lead Safeguarding Officer. The College also works closely with Lena Counselling Services to support students this support is available 24/7.

Mrs McKeown reported that 40 safeguarding concerns were raised last year, compared with 45 so far this year. To date, four referrals have already been made to Social Services this year, compared with seven referrals in total during the previous year. In addition, Student Engagement Officers are based on each campus to provide early intervention and support for students. Members also noted that there had been 37 phone calls from the PSNI during the 2025–26 academic year to date.
It was acknowledged that safeguarding is an extremely busy and demanding area of College life, with issues becoming increasingly complex and serious as the student body continues to grow.

Mrs Nesbitt added that staff are well supported in the event of a disclosure they are appropriately trained and understand the processes for responding and escalating concerns.

Mrs McKeown also informed members that she had recently met with Governor Mr Sloan, the newly appointed temporary Safeguarding Officer.

Ms Shackels rejoined the meeting at 18.11pm

Dr Moore stated that it was very reassuring to him, as Chair of the Governing Body, that there is strong support in place for all students and staff.

Mrs Bradley joined the meeting at 18.25pm

A08. HARDSHIP UPDATE

Mrs McKeown drew members' attention to the paper attached, which outlined the key areas relating to the amounts awarded and actual spend for 2025/26. She also provided an overview of the different types of funding allocated, including support for transport, fees, books and equipment, and assistance with childcare costs.
She advised that the amount awarded decreases each year, and that the College returns unspent funding annually as students are required to exhaust all other channels of funding such as student loans before accessing hardship support.

Members were also informed of an initiative delivered by the Six College's from 5 January to 27 March 2026, entitled "Educational Eats", which provided 81,112 meals to students across all campuses. This included 45,483 breakfasts and 35,629 lunches. The funding for this comes from the underspent money from the Hardship fund.

Mrs Campbell joined the meeting at 18.28pm.

Dr Moore thanked Mrs McKeown for her report.

A09.STUDENT COUNCIL SUMMARY REPORT 2025-2026

Members were given the opportunity to ask questions regarding the report. It was noted that work is ongoing to ensure all actions are fully closed out.

Members were advised that there has been an 8% reduction in the number of issues raised, with the majority relating to estates, car parking and canteen matters. Any teaching-related issues are addressed through curriculum area managers. Student representatives also meet with lecturers and relevant staff to discuss concerns regarding teaching and learning.
Surveys are completed on an ongoing basis, and evaluations are carried out at the end of each semester. The National Student Survey is now conducted at the end of both Year 1 and Year 2, rather than solely at the point of course completion.

Ms Corhea left the meeting at 18.30pm

Dr Moore said the response to the student queries was a positive one. He thanked Mrs McKeown for the report.

Dr Finnigan commented that she has seen firsthand the positive impact the Educational Eats programme has had on students, particularly in relation to attendance and concentration levels in class. She also noted that students are very appreciative of the support provided through this programme.

Mrs Nesbitt also informed members of another way the college supports students. This is through the SRC Eats app, which students can use when purchasing food to accumulate points that can be redeemed for free food.

Ms Corhea rejoined the meeting at 18.36pm

The Chair thanked Mrs McKeown for the work involved in preparing these reports and for the continued efforts of her and her team in the key areas of safeguarding and hardship support.

Mrs McKeown left the meeting at 18.38 pm.

A10. DIRECTORS UPDATE ON THEME - RETENTION AND INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Ms Shackels advised that retention remains a key area for attention. She noted that the Retention Toolkit has been in place since 2017 and is refreshed annually to ensure it remains fit for purpose. She added that student retention is often a complex issue, influenced primarily by individual, social, and economic factor. She further stated that the College's focus is on reducing dropout rates and demonstrating to stakeholders, including Governors, QAA, ETI, and the Department for the Economy, that effective processes are in place.

Attendance and at-risk student data is provided regularly to the Heads of Faculty to enable appropriate responses. Curriculum Area Managers and personal tutors work together to identify underlying issues and then meet with students to put in place action plans to support them. Students are given the opportunity to "Swap Don't Drop" within the first six weeks of the academic year, allowing them to swap courses if they feel the one originally chosen is not right for them.

Dr Moore thanked staff for the work they continue to do to ensure students are supported across all areas of learning.

The Chair asked how a retention strategy might differ in a digitalised learning environment. Ms Shackels responded that significant resources were developed during COVID such as Canvas; however, students have indicated a preference for in-person delivery. She added that digital tools are used as an aid rather than a replacement for classroom-based teaching, with approximately 75% of teaching and learning being most or highly effective in a face-to-face context.

Dr Finnigan commented that she has seen firsthand the benefit of Microsoft Teams being used within the College. This has been a valuable investment for the College, supporting ongoing interaction with students and pastoral care. Ms Corhea echoed the comments from Dr Finnigan.

Mrs Bradley also highlighted the role of the Monitoring Placement Officers within the College for apprenticeship students while on placement. She noted that they provide key pastoral support for students whose teaching and learning is not based in the classroom.

Members were advised that, this year, the College made the decision to enter 592 students for GCSE Maths rather than Essential Skills. Attendance at the first exam on 14 May 2026 was over 85%. This was a joint effort across multiple departments within the College, including Campus Services, Estates, and Examinations, to ensure the campuses were prepared, the exam ran smoothly. Ms Shackels placed on record her thanks to all involved in ensuring the day went ahead as planned.

From September 2026, each student will receive a corporate presentation on literacy and numeracy and the importance of this for their career development and will complete both GCSES (if necessary) alongside their chosen course of study.

A11. CURRICULUM PLANNING CYCLE - CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Ms Shackels took members through the presentation and answered any questions members had.

Dr Moore asked whether the Curriculum Planning Cycle is standard across all Colleges. Ms Shackels responded that the commitment to the Curriculum demonstrated is driven by all staff within Southern Regional College.

Mrs Campbell added that, over the past number of years, there has been more robust engagement across all departments within the College to strengthen relationships and improve collaborative working.

A12. WHOLE COLLEGE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN UPDATED 25/26 FEEDBACK 26/27

Members reviewed the full report and the accompanying four-page summary provided by Ms Shackels. They were also given the chance to ask questions, which were addressed during discussion of the plan.

In summary, the SRC Quality Improvement Plan 2025–26 is structured around 10 Areas for Improvement, with the College broadly on track or ahead of target across most areas as of May 2026. Key strengths include strong performance in international engagement, widening participation, and employer engagement, where targets have been exceeded. The main areas requiring continued focus are Full-Time Higher Education enrolment, along with retention and achievement in specific underperforming programmes.

The Traineeship Action Plan is also progressing well, with recruitment targets broadly met. Monitoring is in place for retention, attendance and achievement.

The Essential Skills Action Plan shows steady incremental progress across all five AFIs, with governance, reporting, and monitoring structures now firmly embedded across the College. Attendance remains the primary challenge, with GCSE Maths at 72.5% and Essential Skills Literacy at 70%, both below the 80% target. However, targeted interventions are in place, and the College is on track for summer 2026 assessments, with planning already underway for 2026–27.

The Chair placed on record his thanks to Ms Shackels for the work undertaken to compile these reports for this evening's meeting.

A13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Nothing to note.

A14. REVIEW OF THE MEETING

Members were content with the meeting and The Chair thanked the staff for the way the papers were presented.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The Chair thanked Members for their attendance at this meeting.

The next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for Tuesday 29 September 2026 at 17.30 in the Boardroom at Banbridge Campus.

The meeting concluded at 19.32pm

[redacted]

CHAIR

3rd November 2026

DATE