

MINUTES OF A MEETING THE SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY HELD ON TUESDAY 19 MARCH 2024 AT 18.30 IN THE BOARDROOM, NEWRY WEST CAMPUS.

PRESENT:

Dr Thomas Moore (Chair)
Mrs Lee Campbell (Interim Principal / CEO)
Mrs Geraldine Campbell
Dr Liz Finnigan
Mr Sean Fitzsimons
Mr Nick Harkness
Mr Stuart Harper
Mrs Monica Kelly
Miss Evie Martin
Mrs Patricia McCaffrey (via TEAMS)
Mr Gary McMurray
Dr Laura Milner
Mrs Sharon O'Hare
Mrs Hilary Singleton
Dr Eileen Stewart
Mrs Tracy Strachan
Mrs Angela Whiteside

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mrs Louise Watson, DfE FE Director (via TEAMS)
Ms Joanne McGuigan, Interim Director of Finance & Planning
Ms Libby Shackels, Director of Curriculum
Mr Raymond Sloan, Director of Client Services
Mrs Sinead Lavery, Boardroom Apprentice
Mr Andrew Sloan, Observer
Miss Lindsay Armstrong, Secretary to the Governing Body

The meeting convened at 18.27.

Dr Moore welcomed Mrs Louise Watson, DfE FE Director to the meeting and advised that she has been invited to provide the Departmental perspective in relation to policy direction.

A06. DEPARTMENTAL ENGAGEMENT

Mrs Watson informed that she plans to discuss the Minister for the Economy's Economic Vision and key objectives, what it could and should mean, the FE Review of Delivery and the Partnership Agreement.

Mrs Watson advised that the Minister's strategy focusses on good jobs, regional balance, productivity and decarbonisation. She clarified that good jobs does not just mean a decent income but also security, fulfilment, conditions and addresses key skills gaps. Members were notified that approximately 26% of the population in NI are economically inactive.

Mr R Sloan arrived at the meeting at 18.32.

Mrs Watson relayed that other key messages of the Minister's are to promote regional balance and raise productivity. She spoke of the role of further education in this regard.

Members were advised on the Minister's goal to reduce carbon emissions and aspirations to reach net zero by 2050 at the latest.

Mrs Watson advised on the tasks for Grade 3s and informed that the FE policy branch is routinely dealing with WorldSkills and funding enquiries, the FE leavers survey and refugee queries. She informed on a key focus to review student support.

Mrs Watson advised that it is important for FE colleges to increase enrolments, optimise the curriculum offer and increase the public's understanding of progression pathways. She informed that Essential Skills inherently remains an issue and needs addressing.

Mrs Watson informed Members on the progression of the FE Delivery Review. She advised on a benchmarking exercise and the workshop convened 22 and 23 February 2024 focusing on cost, value and outcomes.

ACTION
By whom

Members were informed that Terms of Reference have been drafted and considerations relate to taking a sectoral approach to policy, measuring success, providing innovative support to employers and the provision of economically relevant curriculum.

Mr Watson informed on workstreams to take forward including curriculum optimisation, workforce planning, addressing the funding model, performance framework and industrial relations.

Mrs Watson advised that the Partnership Agreement which came into effect from 1 February 2024 aims to address the relationship between the College and the Department and explains the overall governance framework within which the College operates, including through which the necessary assurances are provided to stakeholders.

Members were informed that the quality of reporting and number of assurances has been reviewed.

Mr McMurray enquired about the impact on student outcome due to ongoing action short of strike. Mrs Watson advised that the Department continue to work closely with the Minister and Principals to address affordability options for lecturer pay awards.

Dr Moore advised that colleges are awaiting to hear the outcome on trade unions' ballot.

Responding to a query from Mrs Singleton regarding the 10X Strategy, Mrs Watson advised that the Department is focused on the Economy Minister's four key objectives.

In response to a query from Mrs Whiteside, Mrs Watson advised that the Department intend to work closely with the Department for Education address Essential Skills and review the nature of provision.

Mrs Watson confirmed that the Department will be writing to FE Chairs to advise on the externally facilitated review of governance effectiveness.

Mrs Watson was thanked for her reports, and she left the meeting at 19.00.

Dr Finnigan, Mrs O'Hare, Miss Martin and Mrs Lavery joined the meeting at 19.00.

A01. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies for absence were received.

A02. DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

The Chair reminded those present to declare at the commencement of the meeting any conflict of interest held in matters to be discussed. No interests were disclosed.

A03. MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING 31 JANUARY 2024

The minutes of the Governing Body meeting of 31 January 2024 were reviewed for accuracy and approved as an accurate record.

A04. MATTERS ARISING

Members reviewed the action log and remarked on helpful ESG training.

Governors noted that a report on tertiary education will be presented to the June meeting along with a new governance framework for approval.

A05. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

- **Actions Log**
- **Correspondence File**

On behalf of all Members, Dr Moore welcomed Mr A Sloan to his first meeting of SRC's Governing Body and advised that he was attending the meeting in an observer capacity.

Dr Moore welcomed Ms McGuigan and congratulated in her new role as Interim Director of Finance and Planning.

Mr A Sloan left the meeting briefly whilst all Members confirmed their endorsement of the recruitment panel's decision and ratified Mr A Sloan as a co-opted Member of the Governing Body.

Members were informed of a Committee Chairs meeting on 29 February 2024 and the Accountability meeting with the Department on 1 March 2024.

Dr Moore directed Members to the James Laddie counsel advice on the restricted governance SharePoint site and advised that the College Employers Forum (CEF) are considering changes to their Constitution. Governors granted their approval for the Chair and Interim Principal / CEO to be Members of the CEF.

Dr Moore informed of a Departmental letter received 19 March 2024 requesting changes to the Articles of Government to reflect the Management Statement and Financial Memorandum being replaced with the Partnership Agreement. All Members agreed to the update.

Members were advised that Mrs L Campbell attended the Chief Executive's Forum Accounting Officer training on 12 March 2024 as a condition of her appointment.

A07. COMMITTEE MINUTES

- **Education Committee 28 November 2023**
- **Education Committee 18 January 2024**
- **Education Committee 27 February 2024**

Mr Harper referred Members to the three sets of minutes and advised that the business of the Education Committee included the approval of policies, discussions regarding artificial intelligence, enrolments and retention, safeguarding practices and reports from the Heads of Faculty. He advised that the Committee had reviewed the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan in detail.

Ms Shackels informed that she had met with the District Inspector on 6 March 2024 and was verbally informed that the College had received an Outcome A on the basis that there is sufficient evidence that the College is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement.

Mr Harper advised on an event scheduled for 26 March 2024 to recognise WorldSkills success.

- **Finance & General Purposes Committee 25 January 2024**

Mrs Strachan referred Members to the draft Finance and General Purposes Committee minutes of 25 January 2024. She advised on discussions regarding budget allocation, management accounts and complaints and compliments.

- **Staffing Committee 30 January 2024**

Dr Stewart advised on discussions taking place at the Staffing Committee meeting of 30 January 2024. She informed that Members had approved a career break request, two policies and reviewed accomplishments contained within the S75 Annual Equality Progress report.

Dr Stewart advised that Members had noted that sickness absence has reduced, completion of mandatory training is at 89% and a 100% completion on appraisals. She relayed that the Committee noted that 110 employee development requests were approved and the College had invested £91k in upskilling staff and college development activities.

Dr Stewart advised that staff had raised over £9k for the NI Children's Hospice in the period September 2023 to December 2023.

- **Audit & Risk Committee 6 February 2024**

Mrs Singleton referred Members to the minutes of the Audit and Risk Committee of 6 February 2024. She advised that Members were presented with the final Report to Those Charged with Governance and informed on an action to review the depreciation policy.

Mrs Singleton informed that the Risk Management policy was reviewed and approved and the Corporate Risk Register has been streamlined to amalgamate risks. She recommended that the updated Register be circulated to the Governing Body for information.

Miss Armstrong

Mrs Singleton advised that of the nine corporate risks, three sit outside the risk appetite and informed on a planned safeguarding audit. She advised that assurance on externally funded programmes is managed through the Corporate Risk Register and a management action to review risks and policy position in relation to artificial intelligence.

The six sets of minutes were formally adopted by the Governing Body.

A08. GOVERNING BODY & COMMITTEE MEETING PLANNER 2024-2025

Governors were presented with the meeting planner for the 2024-2025 academic year and agreed to adjust the April 2025 Governing Body date and consider moving the May 2025 Finance and General Purposes Committee meeting.

A09. PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

The Governing Body formally adopted the Partnership Agreement effective from 1 February 2024. Mrs L Campbell advised on the requirement to agree a governance framework. Dr Moore informed on the action to have an externally facilitated review of governance effectiveness every three years.

A10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None to report.

A11. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next Governing Body meeting is scheduled for 18.30 on Tuesday 18 June 2024 in the Boardroom, Banbridge campus.

The meeting concluded at 19.36.

CH 

3/4/24.
DATE