

SOUTH WEST COLLEGE GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of a Meeting of the **South West College Governing Body**
held on Wednesday 26 March 2008 at 5.40 pm in
Room MG04, Enniskillen Campus

PRESENT: Mr Pat O’Kane (Chairman)
Mrs Kate Courtenay
Dr Mark Kelly
Mr Gerard McDermott
Mr Joseph McFall
Mr Joseph Martin
Dr Nicholas O’Shiel
Mr Victor Refaussé (Director)
Mrs Diane Stevenson
Ms Gwen Stevenson

APOLOGIES: Mr Ian Hayes
Mr Gerry Kingston

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs Bernie O’Hare, Director, Further Education Division, DEL
Mrs Elizabeth McSorley, Secretary to the Governing Body

1.0 ASSESSMENT OF GOVERNING BODY CHAIR

The Chairman welcomed Mrs Bernie O’Hare, DEL, to the meeting.

Mrs O’Hare advised that she was attending the meeting in an observer capacity for the purposes of assessing the Chair’s performance as part of a wider assessment process. She outlined the other aspects of the assessment system, including written assessment of the Chair’s performance by each member of the Governing Body, and said that this process was in accordance with the requirements of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Public Appointments for persons serving in publicly appointed positions.

Mrs O’Hare further indicated that she would be leaving around 7.00 pm.

2.0 MINUTES OF GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON WEDNESDAY 27 FEBRUARY 2008

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: to all members, minutes of a meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 27 February 2008. It was noted that the confidential section had not been circulated to staff members.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr McDermott, seconded by Mr Martin, that the public section of the minutes (Pages 1-9) be accepted as a true and accurate record. They were then signed by the Chairman.

3.0 MATTERS ARISING

3.1 Presentation by Mrs C Bell, Deputy Secretary, DEL – Page 1, Minute Ref 1.0

It was noted, from a recent communication to governors from the Secretary to the Governing Body, that the Deputy Secretary would be unable to attend the forthcoming strategic planning event and that the session relating to the Department's vision for the development of Further Education in Northern Ireland would be taken by Mr Daryl Young, FE Programme Manager.

AGREED: at the request of Mr Martin, that the Deputy Secretary be invited to give her input to a future meeting of the Governing Body.

3.2 Ballot for Industrial Action Amongst Lecturers – Page 8, Minute Ref 14.1

The Director, at the invitation of the Chair, gave an update on the recent UCU ballot of its members and advised that the majority of the votes cast had been in favour of strike action and action short of strike action. He understood that a meeting of the Union to discuss practical arrangements for implementation of the mandate for industrial action was to take place shortly.

It was noted from further comments made by the Chair and the Director that discussions would continue at all levels in an effort to achieve a resolution to this long standing dispute.

3.3 Training Update – Page 8, Minute Ref 15.1

The Secretary to the Governing Body advised that the training for Audit Committee members to be delivered by CIPFA on behalf of DEL was scheduled to take place on Tuesday 13 May 2008 and that it was understood invitations to the event would be issued shortly. She further advised that DEL had indicated that should be no difficulty in accommodating interested non Audit Committee members who wished to participate in the training.

In responding to comments made Dr O'Shiel in relation to DEL's emphasis on good corporate governance and on the Governing Body's view that corporate governance training should be more aligned to FE Means Business; the College's own strategic planning event; and the demands placed on the Governing Body Chair; Mrs O'Hare advised that the Department was keen to communicate its strategic vision for the next three years to Colleges and therefore welcomed the opportunity, through Mr Daryl Young, and possibly through a future presentation by the Deputy Secretary, to present this to the South West College. She acknowledged the demands placed on Governing Body Chairs, and on Governing Bodies generally, and said that on foot of a change in legislation the previous year, DEL had submitted a business case to the Department for Finance and Personnel for remuneration of Chairs in the first instance.

4.0 MINUTES OF SPECIAL GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON FRIDAY 7 MARCH 2008

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: to all members, minutes of a Special Meeting of the Governing Body held on Friday 7 March 2008.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mr Martin, seconded by Dr O'Shiel, that the minutes of the above meeting be accepted as a true and accurate record. They were then signed by the Chairman.

5.0 MATTERS ARISING

5.1 Report and Recommendations from Selection Panel

The Chairman thanked the members of the Governing Body Selection Panel for their dedicated input to the selection process for the three senior management positions which he described as 'a long and arduous process which had been performed with great care and attention by all'.

6.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE STAFFING COMMITTEE HELD ON WEDNESDAY 12 MARCH 2008

PREVIOUSLY CIRCULATED: to all members, report of a meeting of the Staffing Committee held on Wednesday 12 March 2008, together with the following draft documents:

- (a) Human Resource Strategy and Action Plan
- (b) Carers Policy
- (c) Student Disability Policy
- (d) Student Disciplinary Policy and Procedure
- (e) Student Attendance Policy

It was noted that the confidential section of the Staffing Committee report had not been circulated to staff or student members.

The report was presented by Mrs Diane Stevenson who had acted as Presiding Chair in the absence of the Committee Chair, Mr McDermott.

Mrs Stevenson highlighted the key issues and recommendations from the public section of the Staffing Committee report with particular reference to the above draft policies. Mr McDermott, in commenting on the draft Carers Policy, said that Mrs Courtenay and himself felt this would merit some further discussion prior to a final recommendation being made to the Governing Body and indicated that the draft Policy was to be taken back to the May meeting of the Staffing Committee for this purpose.

AGREED: on the proposal of Mrs Stevenson, seconded by Mr McDermott, adoption of the public section of the Staffing Committee report (Pages 1-8) including the Human Resource Strategy and Action Plan and the three student policies, with the draft Carers Policy to be referred back to the May

meeting of the Staffing Committee as requested by the Staffing Committee Chairman.

7.0 REPORT OF A MEETING OF THE FINANCE AND GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE HELD ON TUESDAY 18 MARCH 2008

CIRCULATED: to those members present, report of a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on Tuesday 18 March 2008, together with the following supporting documents:

- (a) Financial Highlight Reports for the seven months to February 2008 together with schedule relating to a review of Training for Success travel costs; and
- (b) Draft Petty Cash Policy and Procedure

Ms Gwen Stevenson, Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, provided members with a comprehensive overview of the key issues and recommendations from the meeting. The discussion that took place during the course of her presentation centred on the following items in particular.

7.1 Financial Management Exception Report

It was noted that because of DEL's fixed travel allowance for Training for Success trainees, and the South West College's rurality, that the College would incur an overspend of approximately £15k on trainee travel costs in the current financial year. Mrs O'Hare undertook to raise this issue for discussion within DEL.

The Director pointed out that the matter was also being pursued through the Northern Ireland Assembly Committee for Employment and Learning following their recent visit to Omagh when the matter had been raised.

The Director, in responding to questions about the impact on the budget in the face of continuing uncertainty in relation to DEL funding towards the cost of redundancies associated with the restructuring, advised that the Department had recently sanctioned six redundancies at management level in order that the restructuring could progress. They had also, he said, prepared a business case for submission to DFP in support of additional finance for the costs of redundancies associated with the restructuring of the FE sector.

Another area questioned under this section was that of administration costs and particularly the ANIC subscription fee. The Chairman, in responding, said that the organisation had been extensively streamlined over the past year and that the subscription payable in 2007/08 represented a significant reduction on the figure payable in previous years.

7.2 Discussion Paper on College Accounts

Ms Stevenson, in response to particular comments on the subject of benchmarking, advised that following completion of the restructuring exercise,

the South West College would benchmark itself against the best performing UK College of a comparable size, not just the other five Northern Ireland Colleges.

It was noted that the DEL summary of College accounts was the only official benchmarking information currently available. One member was of the view that DEL should be producing benchmarking information on a quarterly or at least half yearly basis for the sector.

7.3 Report on College Investments

On receiving an indication that there was to be discussion on this issue, the Chairman, Mr O’Kane, formally declared an interest in the subject matter and left the meeting.

Some members questioned the ability of the Governing Body to make informed investment decisions in the absence of independent expert advice, particularly in view of the volatile state of the market at present and in view of the Chairman’s inability to contribute to the process due to a conflict of interest. This led to a lengthy discussion as to how best the Governing Body could meet its probity and accountability obligations in safeguarding College funds while seeking to maximise the investment opportunities available to it within existing parameters.

AGREED: that all future investment decisions should be informed by independent expert advice and that an approach should be made to DEL/DFP in this regard.

Mrs O’Hare undertook to take the matter back to the Department for discussion.

Mr O’Kane re-entered the meeting at this juncture.

AGREED: on the proposal of Ms Stevenson, seconded by Mr McDermott, adoption of the report of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, including the reports at (a) and (b) above, subject to the foregoing.

7.4 Cheque Signatories

The Chairman, by way of additional business under the Finance and General Purposes Committee report, advised that approval was being sought for the three recently appointed senior managers to become cheque signatories, in addition to the Director. Approval, he said, was furthermore being sought for cheques to be signed by any two of the approved cheque signatories.

The Director commented that he was currently the sole cheque signatory.

AGREED: (1) following discussion, that approval be granted for:

- (a) **Mrs Celine McCartan, Head of Corporate Services, Mr Malachy McAleer, Head of Curriculum and Business Development, and Mr Leo Murphy, Head of Client Services, to act as cheque signatories along with the Director, Mr Victor Refaussé;**

- (b) all cheques to have two signatures; and
- (c) all cheques over £50k to be signed by the Director and one other.

AGREED: (2) that the above arrangement be reviewed by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at the end of June 2008, primarily from the point of view of determining whether any additional cheque signatories were required.

8.0 ARRANGEMENTS FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING EVENT FOR GOVERNORS AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Chairman outlined the proposed Programme for the strategic planning event to be held on the evening of Wednesday 16 April and the morning of Thursday 17 April 2008 in the Lough Erne Golf Resort, Belleek Road, Enniskillen, and suggested that governors might find it useful to review the DEL publication 'FE Means Business' in advance.

It was noted that there would be DEL input to the Wednesday evening session and that the focus for the Thursday morning session would be the development of a strategic framework for the College.

AGREED: that the proposed Programme be approved.

9.0 CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

9.1 Anonymous Letter

The Chairman, with reference to an anonymous letter that had been issued at the end of February 2008 to the majority of governors and others, including the Department and the Northern Ireland Audit Office, advised that the Department had written to him asking him to complete a review matrix in relation to the matters raised within the correspondence. He then went on to share the contents of his response with members which, he said, had been completed in consultation with the Director.

Mrs O'Hare confirmed that on the basis of the Chairman's response, the matter was now closed.

9.2 Outstanding Governing Body Appointments

The Chairman advised that the replacement business governor and the two Education and Library Board nominees were currently going through the POCVA checking process, adding that it was hoped all three would be in a position to take up their places on the Governing Body at the next meeting on 28 May 2008.

It was noted that there were no scheduled meetings in April.

10.0 DIRECTOR'S BUSINESS

10.1 Workforce Development Forum

The Director, by way of a progress report on the establishment of a Workforce Development Forum, advised members that the Chairman was a Mr Donald Hackett, Managing Director of Classic Marble Ltd, and said that three events aimed at the engineering, construction, and hospitality, travel and tourism sectors respectively, were being staged by the Forum as follows:

23 April 2008 – Dungannon (Engineering)

21 May 2008 – Omagh (Construction)

4 June 2008 – Enniskillen (Hospitality, Travel and Tourism)

In responding to members questions and comments, the Director advised that the events would be publicised through the local press, letter, and personal contact and said that the Workforce Development Forum as an entity would be championed by everyone associated with it.

10.2 Skills Centre Contract

The Director reported that the contractor had moved onto the site on 3 March 2008 and that work on the new Skills Centre was now underway.

11.0 AMENDMENTS TO THE REGISTER OF INTERESTS 2007/08

The Secretary to the Governing Body reminded members of their responsibility under the Instrument of Government to declare any amendments to the Register of Interests.

No amendments were reported.

Mrs O'Hare left the meeting at this juncture and, in her parting comments, undertook to feed back through the Chair on those items which she had agreed to raise within the Department.

12.0 CORRESPONDENCE

There was no correspondence.

13.0 ANY OTHER RELEVANT BUSINESS

13.1 Student Support Fund

The Director, in response to questions raised by Mr McDermott in relation to administration of the Student Support Fund, undertook to issue him with all relevant documentation including a copy of the Student Support Fund Policy

that had been approved through the Finance and General Purposes Committee, together with DEL guidelines.

Mrs Courtenay also asked to be provided with a copy of the documentation pack.

13.2 Publications

CIRCULATED: for information purposes to those members present, a copy of each of the following publications:

- (1) South West College Equality and Diversity Information Leaflet; and
- (2) South West College Full-Time Prospectus 2008/09

It was suggested that the images used in College publications should be as representative of the student population as possible.

The Staff representatives left the meeting at this juncture and the meeting then went into private session.

The meeting concluded at 8.00 pm

CHAIRMAN _____ **DATE** _____