
**MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWELFTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF
THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS COMMENCING 17:00**

PRESENT:

Prof M Ó'Neill, Governing Body Temporary Chair (out for item 112.7, Report 2.1)

Mr P Clancy

Mrs D Creevy

Mr B Dougherty

Dr S Fisher

Mr R Godfrey

Mrs M Gormley

Dr K Kennedy

Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive (out for item 112.7, Report 2.1)

Mr B O'Neill

Mrs C Shongo

Mr P Thompson

Ms V Toland (from 17:55)

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director

Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards

Ms S Kelly, HR Manager (from 18:45)

Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services (from 17:40)

Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

APOLOGIES

Mr F Smyth

Mrs S McMahon

112.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Temporary Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to Mr R Godfrey who was recently elected as the Student Governor representative on the Board. The Student Governor provided a short synopsis to the Board on the various roles within the Student Council.

Ms V Toland provided prior notice that she would be arriving late to the meeting.

112.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS/DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no conflict of interest declarations and no declarations of any other business.

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**Report 1 Summary Register of Interests – November 2024**

The Summary Register of Interest Report was noted with the addition of a new entry for the Student Governor.

112.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 25 SEPTEMBER 2024**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

The Draft Minutes of the Governing Body meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

111.6 Correspondence was sent to the Executive Office to voice the Board's support for the continuation of the Boardroom Apprentice Programme. A response was received from the Executive Office on 11 November 2024 acknowledging the correspondence.

- The Boardroom Apprentice Impact Study 2024 was sent to Governors on 24 October 2024. A Governor noted that the Programme continues to run in the UK.

111.7 The presentation from the IT Security Manager provided at the Audit & Risk Committee in September 2024 meeting was shared with the remaining Board members on 23 October 2024.

11.8 Correspondence was sent on behalf of the Board to Ms L Watson, Director of FE on the outcomes of the Department's National Student Survey results for 2023/24 final year, HE students. Ms Watson responded in acknowledging the excellent news and congratulated the Governing Body and staff at NWRC on such positive news.

**Report 2 DRAFT NOTES OF THE STRATEGY WORKSHOP HELD ON
25 SEPTEMBER 2024****➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Draft Notes of the Strategy Workshop held on 25 September 2024 were noted.

Report 2.1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

The Principal reported that further work on the Strategy will take place on 17 January 2025. An invite will be sent to the Director of FE to attend. A discussion took place on agenda items The Governing Body Chair welcomed other suggestions from Governors.

112.4 GOVERNING BODY TEMPORARY CHAIR'S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó'Neill**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS****Report 1 External Board Effectiveness Review Proposal**

The Governing Body Chair reported that Innovation and Consultancy Services (ICS) will be undertaking the Review. This review will be carried out Sector wide.

Key points from the Proposal were highlighted including the fee (£15,950 + VAT), the Terms of Reference, the Draft Survey and the planned meetings with relevant The Chair, Principal, Governors, Governing Body Secretary and the Department

Official. The final report is expected early 2025.

The Board were content to proceed with the Proposal.

PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 2 Governing Body Self Assessments 2023/24

The Report was noted.

Report 2.1 Key Points from the Self-Assessment 2023/24

The Governing Body Chair brought members through the Report. It was noted that Governing Body and Committee attendance for 2023/24 was down on the previous year. Following discussion with individual Governors during the Assessment process it is hoped that attendance will improve going forward.

For all themes, the views expressed were more positive than or equal to 2022/23 with 100% of respondents agreeing/strongly agreeing with all themes. The positive comments together with the variances in statements from 2022/23 were noted.

Comments were received from Governors on the Assessment process.

112.5 PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS – Mr L Murphy

- The Principal apprised the Board on his recent business activity and strategic engagements including the successful HE & Access Graduation on 30 October 2024. The Governing Body Chair and fellow Governors also attended this event.
- Funding for the NW Digital Employment Pathway Training Hub (NW DEPTH). A total of €46,064,915 of PEACEPLUS funding announced to improve equal access to inclusive and quality services in education, training and lifelong learning in Northern Ireland and the border counties of Ireland.
- (Almost €10M funding) - NW DEPTH - delivering a digital skills framework targeting the Northwest City Region. The project aims to establish and deliver a portfolio of upskilling programmes to the existing digital workforce.
- Funding received to the Green Accelerator Skills Programme (GRASP) Action Plan (NWRC also a partner) GRASP will include two Green Skills Academies which will cater towards 'Women in Construction' and 'Labour Activation'.
- The College is considering the potential for establishing a Project Office to manage these programmes.
- Magee Expansion Taskforce continue to meet regularly.
- Invest NI Consultation meeting 9 October 2024: RE INI New Business Strategy.
- INI Conference – Launch of new Business Strategy – 19 November 2024
- Partnership Engagement Event Belfast – 10 October 2024 (focus – DfE Business Plan)
- Principal's Group continue to meet monthly.
- "College Conversation" - one to one meeting with L Watson on College/sector matters.
- Global Innovation Submit – QUB (private dinner Hillsborough)

Upcoming events and meetings include:

- College hosting Mr P Marty (Penn College) - working lunch on 27 November 2024
- College Alliance Conference in Belfast (3 & 4 December 2024)
Title: Squaring the Circle: Shaping the Future of Colleges at a Time of Challenge.
- DfE Strategy Day (5 December 2024) – invite sent to the Principal, Directors, GB Chair, GB Vice Chair and Committee Chairs.

The Governing Body Chair thanked the Principal and welcomed the discussion and comments from the Board.

Ms V Toland joined this meeting during this item.

112.6 GOVERNING BODY SECRETARY'S BUSINESS

Report 1 Staff Governor Election – verbal report

The Governing Body Secretary updated the Board on the Staff Governor Election. The nomination period closed on 8 November 2024. No valid nominations were received therefore nominations re-commenced on 14 November 2024 and will close on 3 December 2024. If an election is necessary this will date place on 9 December 2024.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Doherty and invited Mr Clancy to present his report to the Board on the business of the recent Education Committee meeting.

112.7 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Mr P Clancy, Committee Chair

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

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|------------|---|
| Report 1 | Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2024 |
| Report 2 | Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting |
| Report 2.1 | Update on Deputation Meeting at DCSDC from the Royal Irish Academy – Mr P Clancy & Mr B O'Neill |
| Report 3 | Draft College Development Plan 2024/25 |
| Report 4 | Compliments, Complaints & Academic Assessment Appeals |
| Report 5 | DfE Commissioning Letter Quality Improvement Planning Submissions 2024/25 |
| Report 6 | Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2023/24 |
| Report 6a | Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2024/25 |
| Report 7 | Business Support Centre Update |
| Report CS1 | Safeguarding Report |

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 13 November 2024

The Draft Minutes of the Education Committee meeting were taken as read and were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs V Toland

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Due to a conflict of interest the Governing Body Chair and Principal left the Teams meeting at this juncture.

Report 2.1 Update on Deputation Meeting at DCSDC from the Royal Irish Academy – Mr P Clancy & Mr B O’Neill

Mr Clancy reported that he and fellow Governor, Mr B O’Neill attended as observers at the meeting on 1 October 2024 at the Derry City & Strabane District Council Office. The Royal Irish Academy presented their report, ‘Finding Common Ground’ at this meeting. Mr Clancy provided detail on the presentation. Mr O’Neill reminded Governors on the guidance received from the Department (DfE) on this matter and read out the proposed draft response to the Council.

It was agreed that the Draft letter be forwarded to the Department (DfE) for their consideration and approval before forwarding to the Council.

PROPOSED, Dr K Kennedy

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

The Governing Body Chair and Principal re-joined the Teams meeting at this juncture.

The Education Committee Chair then followed on with the key items from the recent Committee meeting. He was pleased to report that Dr S Fisher has agreed to take on the role as Vice Chair of the Committee.

The Estates Team will explore the options available to provide a common room facility for HE students and have included this into their 2025 Programme of Works. The Committee Chair attended the ETI evaluation meeting for the Step-Up Programme on 17 October 2024. Overall, the report was very positive.

Key points from the Management Report presented to the Committee included information on the following;

- ETI Evaluation of the Traineeship provision is due to commence on 13 January 2025.
- Part of the Staff Conference, ‘Empowering Improvement’ referenced the new Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) Quality Code for Higher Education (July 2024).
- As part of the Multiply Project a very successful Maths Week Ireland Event was held at the Springtown Campus on 18 October 2024.
- Positive picture in relation to full-time enrolments against CDP targets. For 2024/25 there were 2901 enrolments against a target of 2981. Part-time enrolments for 2024/25 were currently showing 5331 against a target 7872 enrolments. Part-time enrolments will continue throughout the academic year.
- Retention increased by 1.1%, achievement by 1.6% and success improved by 2.3% from 2022/23 (FELs data).

Report 3 – Draft College Development Plan 2024/25 - The Draft College

Development Plan was presented in the new format with a new set of KPI’s. The College is waiting on the final sign off from the Department (DfE). It is expected that the 2025/26 CDP will be commissioned at an early stage in this academic year.

Report 4 Compliments, Complaints & Academic Assessments Appeals 2023/24

Compliments increased from the previous year. Formal and informal complaints increased in 2023/24 from 2022/23. No complaints were presented to the NI Public Services Ombudsman for the period of the academic year 2023/24. No Academic Appeals were received during 2023/24. The Academic Support Governor added that receiving no academic appeals was a reflection of the work of the academic staff.

Report 5 DfE Commissioning Letter Quality Improvement Planning Submissions 2024/25**Report 6 Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2023/24****Report 6a Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2024/25**

The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards brought the Committee through the main components from the Quality Reports and the required submissions to the Department (DfE).

Report 6 Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2023/24

An updated Plan for 2023/24 was presented in the new format. Governors were requested to review and approve the plan.

Report 6a Draft Whole College Improvement Plan 2024/25

The Director noted the new Sector Quality Improvement Plan 2024/25 format. The new format has been mapped to align more effectively with the College Development Plan, the Minister for the Economy's, Economic Vision, the Programme for Government, the QIA and ETI inspection frameworks. The nine key areas for improvement were highlighted for the College to work through in the 2024/25 academic year.

Members will get further opportunity to consider and review the Document (GB 112.7, Report 6a) further and provide feedback through the Secretary to the Governing Body.

The final version of the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2024/25 will be provided to the Board in December. The Plan must be submitted to the Department (DfE) on or before 24 January 2025.

The Governors noted that quality is embedded in the College and confirmed the following;

- **Governors approved the update of the Whole Quality Improvement Plan submitted for 2023/24 (Report 6)**
- **Governors noted the Draft Whole Quality Improvement Plan for 2024/25 (Report 6a)**
- **Governors noted the Assurance Statement for FE 2024/25 – (Report 5, Annex A)**
- **Governors noted the Assurance Statement for HE 2024/25 (Report 5, Annex C)**

PROPOSED, Mr B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Report 7 Business Support Centre Update

The Business Support Centre Update was noted.

Report CS1 Safeguarding Report

The Board noted the Report. In Committee a robust discussion took place highlighting the increasing number of students that the Safeguarding Team is managing. The importance of continued links with partnership and community groups were noted.

The Head of Client Services reported to the Board that there is focus on the work to ending violence against women and girls. A working group has been established. This includes joining the White Ribbon NI Pledge. This work aligns to the Programme for Government's Strategy in relation to ending violence against women and girls.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Clancy and Ms Moss and invited Mrs Creevy to present her report to the Board.

112.8 RESOURCES COMMITTEE – Mrs D Creevy, Committee Chair**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS - Finance papers**

Report 112.8 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Resources Committee
Meetings held on 5 & 8 November 2024

- Report 1 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting
- Report 2 Management Accounts for the 2 Months to 30 September 2024
- Report 3 Budget Update 2024/25
- Report 4 Fees & Charges Policy 2025/26
- Report 5 Bad Debt Write-Off
- Report 6 Draft Business Case - Strand Road Assembly Hall Refurbishment
- Report 6.1 Annex A Condition Report
- Report S1 Health & Wellbeing Brochure
- Report S2 HR Services Annual Report
- Report C1 Data Protection/Compliance Update
- Report C2 Equality Report

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 2024

The Draft Minutes of the Governing Body meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr P Thomson

The Committee Chair reported that the key points from the Committee included;

- The Sustainability Committee has been re-established. The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards and the Finance Director will co-chair this Committee.
- The Finance Director and Mr F Tuffy, Business Support Centre Manager attended and presented at Edinburgh College's Innovation Conference in October 2024. The College's Business Support Centre was referred to as a model of good practice.
- The Committee received the Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024 however approval was not sought – this will be reported further through the Audit & Risk Committee Chair's Report (112.9, Report 1).

- The Prompt payment figure for the 30 days for October 2024 was 93% and the year to date was 95%.

Report 3 Budget Update 2024/25

The Department (DfE) advised the College of an updated DEL Resources Budget of £33.035m in October 2024. Main changes to the Budget 2024/25, DfE Grants, Skill UP Funding, an increase of £540k together with additional funding for other projects. Recent funding not included in the Budget Update was noted by the Principal earlier within his report (Ref GB 112.5).

Skill Focus funding, which is currently 75%, DfE funded with a 25% contribution from employers has been reduced to a 10% employer contribution. There has been agreement from Trade Unions on the Support staff pay rise from April 2024. A £1,290 increase or 2.5% will be awarded whichever is higher. There are still no developments for the academic staff for September 2024. Staff costs have increased (£468k) these are mainly related to additional funding received.

Members were content to approve the Budget 2024/25

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

Report 4 Fees & Charges Policy 2025/26 - not recommending any changes to the fees charged in respect to full-time, Higher Education or part-time courses for 2025/26.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr L Murphy

Report 5 Bad Debt Write-Off - £7,124.50. This represents 32 individual debts.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

Report 6 Draft Business Case - Strand Road Assembly Hall Refurbishment

Report 6.1 Annex A Condition Report

The Finance Director provided the Board with background to the Project. As part of the proposed scheme the College is also planning to refurbish the existing fitness suite as well. Approval is sought in **principle to request £2,536,173 of funding from the Department (DfE) for this project**. Subject to internal review and sign off the intention is to submit the OBC formally to DfE in December 2024.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr L Murphy

Discussion followed on the Project, Mr B Dougherty welcomed the Project stating it may provide the opportunity for local sports/community/schools to use the new facilities. The Finance Director agreed to link in with Mr Dougherty post meeting.

The Committee Chair followed up reporting on the key Staffing matters discussed at the Committee meeting.

- From 21/08/2024 to 22/10/2024 a total of 41 recruitment exercises were completed. Since 1 September 2024, the College has advertised a total of 35 posts. The majority of these were support posts (27). Within the Curriculum Resourcing Plan 2024, 31 posts were approved, 77% of the posts have been filled and work continues to fill the remaining posts.
- There continues to be 'difficult to recruit' posts in certain areas. The Department (DfE) have had conversations with the College to review criteria relating to the Trainer Assessor post in Magilligan which has been particularly difficult to fill.
- The sickness absence review showed days lost per employee in the Sector currently at 10.68. The College is second lowest with 9.40 days lost per employee.
- The overall Lost Time Rate for the months of August and September 2024 has seen a decrease compared to the previous year. The most common reasons for absence within the College from 1 August – 17 October 2024 has been hospital/post operative and personal stress.
- The Sector benchmarking figures relating to staff turnover rates for 2023/24 was showing 9.15% for the College against the Sector average at 13.52%.

Report S2 HR Services Annual Report – September 2023 – August 2024

The Report included the summary of outcomes and results for 2023/24 in numerous areas. It was a challenging year with industrial action and the Voluntary Severance Scheme, followed by the commencement of a restructuring exercise of the Directorate.

In concluding her Report the Chair of the Resources referred to the Data Protection/Compliance Update noting that work has taken place on student communications to raise awareness of protecting data online and smishing/phishing threats.

The Equality Report (C2) noted that feedback was received from the Equality Commission in relation to the recent submission of the S75 Annual Progress Report submission. The feedback was extremely positive, and the work of the Equality Officer was acknowledged.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Creevy invited Mrs Shongo to present her report to the Board.

112.9 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs C Shongo, Committee Chair**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 1	Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 12 November 2024
Report 2	Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
Report 3	Report to the Audit & Risk Committee
Report 4	Bribery Policy
Report 5	Raising Concerns Policy
Report 6	Annual Report of the Audit & Risk Committee for 2023/24 to the Governing Body
Report 7	NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance
Report 8	Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024
Report 9	Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024

The Committee Chair apprised the Board of the business of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting.

▪ **Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 12 November 2024**

The Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

The Board were apprised with the updates to the Corporate Risk Register. These updates were in respect to the following risks;

- **Risk COR0003 – Implementation of DfE TAMS** - progress has continued and whilst there are still some minor issues it was agreed to remove this risk from the Corporate Risk Register.
- **Risk COR0011 – Impact of Industrial Action** - currently no industrial action planned; however, risk remains on register.
- **Risk COR0012 – Staffing: Impact of Recruitment, Retention, Pay Levels & Sickness on College Business** - score reduced to a low residual priority.

The Health & Safety Annual Report 2023/24 presented to the Risk Management Committee noted that no injuries were required to be reported to The Health & Safety Executive under the requirements of the RIDDOR regulations for 2023/24.

Report 4 Bribery Policy

The changes were noted and accepted by the Board.

PROPOSED, Mr P Clancy

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Report 5 Raising Concerns Policy

The Raising Concerns Policy was provided for information. The Policy was reviewed with no changes proposed.

Report 6 Annual Report of the Audit & Risk Committee for 2023/24 to the Governing Body

The Report provided an overview of membership, meeting attendance, Internal Audit activities and the Internal Audit Report which stated that there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control.

The report also provided an overview of External Audit, which stated performance was acceptable. The Audit & Risk Committee's Self-Assessment analysis was noted which outlined that the Committee agreed it was performing its functions effectively.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 7 NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance

The Report outlined that subject to a satisfactory resolution of the valuation of the pension asset issue, it proposed that the Financial Statements will be certified by an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. NIAO also confirmed that in 2023-24 there were: no irregular expenditure identified and no uncorrected misstatements. There was one Priority 2 recommendation, (accepted by management) to review fully depreciated assets.

Report 8 Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024

Following the reporting for the Resources Committee meeting (Ref Report 112.8), it was highlighted there was an outstanding issue impacting all NI Colleges relating to the NILGOSC pension scheme, (NWRC value of £5.7m). Colleges have accounted for the pension asset in 2023/24 the same way as the asset was accounted for in 2022/23. To manage this issue to the auditor's satisfaction, the sector will now seek updated valuations for March 2024 (in relation to the Department's (DfE) Accounts) and July 2024 from our actuary. There will be a prior year adjustment required for the 2022/23 accounts, therefore a valuation will be required for this time. Due to this delay, approval was not sought at this meeting for the Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024.

There are significant fees for the Sector for requesting further actuary valuations. The Board noted its disappointment with this matter.

It will be necessary to hold another Audit & Risk Committee, Resources Committee and full Board meeting to approve the Annual Report & Financial Statements once the audit is complete.

Report 9 Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2024

Members were content to approve the Report.

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Ms D Creevy

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Shongo.

112.10 CORRESPONDENCE

Other than correspondence reported during the meeting no other correspondence had been received.

112.11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no any other business declared earlier in the meeting (112.2).

112.12 RESERVED BUSINESS

Taken separately.

Date of Next Meeting; 17 January 2025

The Governing Body Chair closed this part of the meeting at 19:17 and thanked those who were required to leave.

Signed : M Ó Néill
Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Temporary Chair

Date; 12 March 2025