
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TENTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD IN THE BOARDROOM, NORTHLAND BUILDING COMMENCING 17:10

PRESENT:

Prof M Ó Néill, Governing Body Temporary Chair
Ms M Breslin
Mr P Clancy
Mrs D Creevy (joined remotely)
Dr S Fisher (joined remotely)
Mrs M Gormley
Mrs J McKeever (joined remotely)
Mrs S McMahan
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mrs C Shongo (joined remotely)
Mr F Smyth
Mr P Thompson (joined remotely)
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Ms S Kelly, HR Manager (from item 110.9)
Mrs C O'Reilly, Boardroom Apprentice
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

APOLOGIES

Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services

110.1 WELCOME & PRESENTATIONS

The Governing Body Temporary Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. On behalf of the Board and Senior Leadership Team a presentation was made to Ms Breslin and Mrs McKeever whose term of office was completing shortly. A presentation was also made to Mrs O'Reilly who had been part of the Boardroom Apprentice Programme for the academic year 2023-24.

110.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS/DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Governing Body Chair noted that an item of correspondence will be taken under the Principal & CE Business (Agenda item 110.6). Due to a conflict of interest with his role in the Ulster University he gave notice he will leave the meeting at this juncture. Mr B O'Neill, Vice Chair will take on the role as Chair for this item.

110.3 SUMMARY REGISTER OF INTERESTS

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 110.3 Summary Register of Interests – June 2024

Members noted the updated report. An additional entry for Mr L Murphy had been added to the Register. Mr Murphy is a member of the Ulster University's Magee Campus Expansion Taskforce.

110.4 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 9 APRIL 2024

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

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

PROPOSED, Mr P Clancy

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

There were no matters arising from this meeting.

110.5 GOVERNING BODY TEMPORARY CHAIR'S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó'Neill

Report 1 Governor Assessments – verbal report

The Governing Body Chair advised that the individual Governor Assessments for 2023/24 will be arranged for August 2024.

Report 2 External Board Effectiveness Review – verbal update

Correspondence was received from the Department (DfE) on 30 May 2024 requesting an update from the Sector Chairs on the External Board Effectiveness Reviews. The Governing Body Chair reported that this matter is ongoing and updates will be provided to the Board.

Dr N O'Shiel has stepped down as Chair of Colleges Employers Forum (CEF). An interim, rotational model has been put in place for the role as chair. Prof M Ó'Neill will initially take on the role. An evaluation of CEF is planned.

Report 3 Co-opted Member – verbal report

The Governing Body Chair apprised Governors that a potential co-optee from the community sector has been approached and he is content for his name to go forward. Correspondence will be sent to his Board to ask them to formally nominate him. The Department (DfE) will then progress the appointment. Members were content with this nomination and process.

Approval was also sought and received from the Board, that following receipt of the formal Minute of Appointment that they are in agreement that the co-optee Governor will serve on one or more of the Committees in readiness for the academic Year 2024/25.

PROPOSED, Prof M Ó' Néill

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

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

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 DfE Economic Vision Statement, February 2024

Report 2 Correspondence from Mr J Kelpie, DCSDC to the Governing Body, 14 June 2024

Report 1 DfE Economic Vision Statement, February 2024

The Principal reported that after a disruptive year following the action short of a strike, he hopes to get back to the normal cycle of business for the new academic year 2024/25. Focus will be on the four key objectives within the DfE, Economic Vision Statement (Report 1). The four objectives are; good jobs; promote regional balance; raise productivity and reduce carbon emissions.

It was agreed to reschedule the Strategy Day to the afternoon of 25 September 2024. This will provide an opportunity to reflect on the Minister's key objectives and develop an Action Plan.

PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

The Principal updated members on recent events and engagements that he has attended including the College Alliance Conference in Cork and the NWTEC Conference which took place on 29 May 2024. Exchanges with East Kent College continues.

It was agreed for the Chair on behalf of the Board to write to Ms F Moran, the Lecturer & Sustainability Champion on her continued great work in this area.

Prof M Ó'Neill left the meeting at this juncture.

Report 2 Correspondence from Mr J Kelpie, DCSDC to the Governing Body, 14 June 24

The Principal referred to correspondence received from Mr J Kelpie, CE Derry City and Strabane District Council for the attention of members of the Governing Body in relation to a motion of Council on Higher Education provision.

Due to the potential conflict with the Principal as a member of the Ulster University's Magee Campus Expansion Taskforce it was agreed that Mr P Clancy, incoming Chair of the Education Committee on behalf of the Governing Body will acknowledge receipt of the letter.

Prof M Ó'Neill returned to the meeting at this juncture.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Murphy and invited Mrs Shongo to present her report to the Board.

110.7 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 21 May 2024

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 21 May 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, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Mrs S McMahon

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

The Committee Chair apprised the Board that two additional risks have been added to the Corporate Risk Register resulting in twelve risks in total. These two risks relate to AI and the Sustainability/ESG Agenda.

The Internal Audit Review Reports received by the Committee in May 2024 included the review on IT Security Controls and the Part-time Lecturer Payments. Both reviews received satisfactory assurance ratings. The Report on the Review for Health & Safety has been delayed and will be provided to the Committee in September 2024.

The NIAO presented the Audit Strategy for 2023/24 to the Committee. The Committee raised their concerns on the increase in the fees now at £40k (£34k in 2023/24). The Finance Director has agreed to speak with Mr B O'Neill, the Engagement Director, NIAO.

The DfE Year End Assurance Statement was submitted to the DfE in April 2024. Two areas were identified as areas of concern: impact of industrial action and uncertainty of the 2024/25 budget.

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) inspection conducted a one-day inspection in April 2024 and reviewed all GCSE applications for Access Arrangements at Strand Road Campus. No issues or recommendations were identified.

The Finance Director reported to the Board that the addendum to the Insurance 2021 Business Case for full insurance cover for 2024/25 is in the final stages. If the Department (DfE) do not provide approval by 31 July 2024 a request will be made to the current Broker (Marsh) for an extension to the current contract.

There were no Direct Award Contracts and the Prompt Payment figures as at 30 April 2024 was 96%, year to date was 96%.

The Committee completed the annual Self-assessment Exercise. Actions were noted. A review of all comments received highlighted some positive and constructive remarks.

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

110.8 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Mr P Clancy, Incoming Committee Chair

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

- Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting held on 28 May 2024
- Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting
- Report 3 Safeguarding Report

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 28 May 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, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

The Incoming Committee Chair reported that in Committee the deep reform of all Qualifications at Level 2 have been slower than planned due to difficulties around OCNi resourcing issues and with the quality assurance process by CCEA as the regulator. In the interim five out of the six FE Colleges will proceed to offer all full-time, Level 2 provision as Traineeships as was the intention for 2024/25.

Overall retention rates to 16 May 2024 were 92%. Attendance for full-time was 83% and part-time 87%. This is a similar pattern on the 2023 rates. Proposed targets for 2024/25 is still a work in progress. The formal commissioning CDP letter for 2024/25 has not been received from the Department (DfE).

The College is projecting 416 full-time MaSN enrolments for 2024/25.

Referring to the 14-19 Agenda the collective response by FE Colleges through the SPWG (Schools Partnership Working Group), sets out the key challenges and opportunities identified by the Working Group and the need for FEC's to strengthen and consolidate links and partnerships with their Area Learning Communities.

The DfE Response to NWRC 2023/24 QIP Submission noted that there is sufficient evidence that the College is planning effectively for learning and quality improvement. Following cessation of action short of strike there is progress of activity in the College quality cycle relating to completion of courses and collation of all learner outcomes.

Dr C O'Mullan apprised the Board that ETI have launched a new model of inspection. The College hopes to invite ETI staff to deliver a presentation to College staff.

The College has submitted a student response rate of 76% to the NSS (National Student Survey) 2023. The outcomes will be available July/August. The Governing Body Chair commended this positive rate of response.

The Strategic Investment Board (SIB) have been tasked to undertake an interim evaluation of the Traineeship programme. The review will incorporate direct engagement and consultation with all stakeholders.

Highlights from the Equality Update noted that from 12 May 2024 the College has a statutory duty to provide period products free of charge on its premises in line with the Period Poverty (Free Products) Act (NI) 2022.

A training session was delivered by the Rainbow Project on 6 June 2024 for Governing Body members. A further training session will be planned for 2024/25.

Discussions at the Sector Equality Co-ordinators' Forum was to introduce support for staff who are neurodivergent.

Report 3 Safeguarding Report

The Safeguarding Team have received a significant increase in referrals with 70 students compared to September to May 2022/23. Anxiety continues to be the most common reason for referral. Extensive work across campuses by the Safeguarding Team to raise the profile of mental health during Mental Health Week from 13 – 19 May 2024.

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

Ms Kelly joined the meeting at this juncture.

110.9 RESOURCES COMMITTEE – Mrs D Creevy, Committee Chair

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS - Finance papers**

- Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 4 June 2024
- Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting
- Report 3 Management Accounts for the 9 Months to 30 April 2024
- Report 3.1 Management Accounts for the 10 Months to 31 May 2024
- Report 4 Budget 2024/25
- Report 5 Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021/24 – Action Plan Review
- Report 6 Human Resources Business Plan Update 2023/24
- Report 7 Equality Report
- Report 8 Data Protection/Compliance Update
- Report 9 Code of Conduct for Governing Body Members
- Report 9.1 DoF Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies (NI) Guidance (FD DFP) 04/14
- Report 9.2 Amendments to the Code of Conduct

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on
4 June 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, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

Finance matters discussed at the recent Committee meeting noted that the Finance Director and the Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards attended a Case Work meeting on the Strabane Town Centre Regeneration Project/Strabane Campus on the OBC on 6 June 2024 with senior Civil Servants. Departmental (DfE) FE representatives also attended the meeting.

- Causeway Coast & Glens, Growth Deal Food Project - tender request went out for a consultant. No replies were received. The tender has been re-issued. SIB will also provide a quote for consultancy.
- Northland Building (PFI) - conditions surveys have been completed. Issues were noted and these have been raised with Grahams. It is the College's expectation that Grahams will address these before the handover in January 2026.
- The Business Support Centre Reported Actual vs Targets for 2023/24 were noted with targets achieved for the year to March 2024. Some targets for 2024/25 have been reduced in line with the reduced funding.

Report 3 Management Accounts for the 9 Months to 30 April 2024**Report 3.1 Management Accounts for the 10 Months to 31 May 2024**

There were no major concerns with the Accounts provided. Due to several staff absences within the Finance Team the Finance Director wished to acknowledge and thank those staff that have stepped up to ensure the Department continued to run effectively.

Report 4 Budget 2024/25

The Draft Budget settlement for 2024/25 was welcomed. The Budget relates to the period to 31 March 2025. The allocation is £32.89m. This represents an increase of £1.098m on the College DEL Resources for 2023/24 excluding STS and RTS funding. Historic pay agreements, inflationary pressures have been baselined. Different elements of funding received, including the additional resource to pay for the 4% increase in the employer's contribution rate with the NI Teachers Pension Scheme. Details on income and expenditure areas were provided as included within Reports 1, 2. The NBDPB format is forecasting a breakeven position to 31 March 2025.

The Finance Director reported the Budget will be updated to reflect changes, mainly following the restructuring process, Traineeship funding, funding in respect to the SOLAS Project and staff pay settlements for 2024/25.

Members were content to approve the Budget 2024/25.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

In concluding the finance matters the Committee Chair reported that correspondence was received by NIFON Representatives from the Department (DfE) on 15 May 2024 in relation to the Department's considerations for the financial year end date. Two options are now to be considered by the Sector and a recommendation to be made to the Department (DfE) by the Principals' Group.

Moving to the Staffing matters, in Committee the Committee Chair reported to the Board that an action from that meeting was for work to take place to simplify the application process for lower band posts. These posts receive low numbers of applications. Mr O'Neill offered his assistance with this matter.

There has been a rise in levels of sickness absence this year in comparison with last year. For April 2024, Overall Lost Time Rate was 5.17% against 3.45% for 2022/23.

The main reason for sickness absence from September 2023 to May 2024 was personal stress (16.19%) and surgery (13.08%).

During the March 2024 there were 145 attendances participating at staff developments events. Since August 2023, 383 Staff Development Applications have been received by HR.

Completion rates for Mandatory Training at May 2024 were all showing 95% and above. The target completion rate is 90%.

At May 2024, 618 (77%) appraisals have been completed with 66 due for completion (8%) and 119 (15%) are outstanding. It was highlighted that the HR system includes those part-time lecturers who do not have current contracts in the outstanding category data, however no appraisals are due.

From 01/02/2024 to 15/05/2024 a total of 23 recruitment exercises were completed. Since 01/09/2023 the College advertised a total of 83 posts. The majority of these were support posts (54). During the Voluntary Severance process the majority of posts were advertised on a temporary basis (67%).

Staff Awards were held on 12 June 2024. Six staff members were awarded HE Fellowship this year.

Report 5 Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2021-24 and Action Plan Review Year 3 2023/24 (Report 5)

The College is progressing through the Strategy. It is hoped that the health and wellbeing initiatives will deliver a range of positive outcomes. The Action Plan showed the key areas of work implemented during 2023/24.

Report 6 Human Resource Business Plan Update 2023/24

The Business Plan for 2023/24 did not include the work in relation to the introduction of the Voluntary Severance Scheme and the restructuring process.

The Equality, Data Monitoring Review 2023/24 and Fair Employment Monitoring Return as at 01/01/24 was provided to Committee members. The headline figures were consistent on previous years. On 1 January 2024 there were a total of 838 employees at the College. 21% of staff from the Protestant Community and 76% from the Roman Catholic Community 3% were non-determined.

There continues to be an under representation of employees from the Protestant Community. Other findings included that the majority of staff in the College were female (61%) with the majority of staff work full-time (70%).

Affirmative Action programmes continue to help address the imbalance in the applicant makeup and workforce. The College works Closely with the Equality Commission and regularly reviews the Affirmative Action Plan.

Report 7 **Equality Report** - noted under the Education Committee (Agenda item 110.8)

Report 8 **Data Protection/Compliance Update**

Members noted the report.

Report 9 **Code of Conduct for Governing Body Members**

Report 9.1 **DoF Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies (NI) Guidance (FD DFP) 04/14**

Report 9.2 **Amendments to the Code of Conduct**

Following the implementation of the Partnership Agreement there is a specific requirement that the Governing Body must have in place a Code of Conduct. The current Code of Conduct has now been amended and has encompassed aspects of the DoF Code of Conduct for Board Members of Public Bodies (Report 9.1).

Members were content to approve the Code of Conduct.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

110.10 SCHEDULE OF BOARD MEETINGS 2024/25

Following earlier discussions (Agenda item 110.6) an amendment will be made to the start time for the September 2024 Board meeting.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Creevy for her report.

110.11 CORRESPONDENCE

Other correspondence to note was received from Ms L Watson, Director of FE, DfE. This related to the College Risk Assessment for 2024 and Engagement Plan for 2024/25. In developing this plan, the Department (DfE) have initially completed the College Risk Assessment and agreed a 'low' risk profile with a number of further improvements actions noted.

The Finance Director has replied to the Department (DfE) on the actions.

110.12 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no any other business to discuss.

110.13 RESERVED BUSINESS – taken separately

The Governing Body Chair brought the meeting to a close. Reserved Business followed.

Date of next meeting: 25 September 2024

Signed: 
Prof M Ó Néill, Governing Body Temporary Chair

Date: 25 September 2024

APPROVED