
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD VIA MICTOSOFF TEAMS, COMMENCING 10:00

PRESENT:

Prof M Ó Néill, Governing Body Temporary Chair
Ms M Breslin
Mr P Clancy
Mrs D Creevy
Mrs S Fisher
Mr S Gillespie (from 12:20)
Mrs M Gormley
Dr K Kennedy
Mrs S McMahon
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mr F Smyth
Mr P Thompson
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE:

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Ms S Kelly, HR Manager
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services
Ms L Watson, Director of Further Education (DfE)
Ms M Doherty, Deputy Secretary, Skills & Education Group (DfE)
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

FOR PRESENTATIONS ITEMS ONLY:

Dr F Tuffy, Technology & Innovation Manager
Ms W Gibbons, Project Officer, North West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC)
Ms F Moran, Sustainability Champion
Ms J Sweeney, Project Director, GEMX North West

The Governing Body Chair welcomed everyone. The meeting was switched to a remote platform at short notice due to the severe weather conditions. He thanked everyone for joining. The Principal outlined the context and the agenda running order for the day.

Mr Murphy introduced Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services to the meeting.

Presentation – Student Services at NWRC

Ms Moss provided a Power Point presentation on the College's work within the Student Services area. This included the strategic context and an overview of the support services. The work of the Careers Service in relation to enterprise and innovation was provided as well as the impact on economic development, social inclusion and social cohesion.

Highlights included the challenging backdrop with 68% of learners from Quintiles 1 and 2. Thirty eight percent of HE enrolments are from Quintile 1. A comment was noted that the Department (DfE) should consider the number of disadvantaged students in the lower quintiles in their calculation of the recurrent block grant.

The significant work taking place in social inclusion projects to ensure equal opportunities for all regardless of background was commended together with the impact on health outcomes. A Cost of Living Initiative was launched last year which allows students to avail of food vouchers and winter warmer packs etc.

The Head of Client Services reported the current benefit system is not favourable to individuals on Universal Credit who wish to undertake study. As a result of barriers for students accessing the Hardship Fund a review is ongoing. A Welfare Fund has also been established.

The College would like to continue to receive funding from the Department (DfE) to continue to employ Progress Coaches. This intervention has proved to be successful. It was noted that the funding model is not part of the review of the 14-19 Strategy. In concluding her presentation Ms Moss provided the meeting with some student success stories.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Ms Moss and invited Mr McKeown, Finance Director to present.

Presentation – Supporting Businesses with Skills and Innovation

Mr McKeown provided some historical context to the development of the Business Support Centre and the teams involved within the Innovation Centres and the Department. He introduced Dr F Tuffy, Technology & Innovation Manager to the meeting.

Dr Tuffy provided a Power Point presentation showing the work of the Business Support Centre, which is that of developing skills, fostering innovation and driving applied research. Last year training opportunities in the Skills Focus programme delivered industry staff training, level 2 and above to 269 employees. The Skill Up Programme delivered programmes to 420 individuals. The Assured Skills academies have created 440 jobs in the past five years. A new academy Vertiv will create 72 electrical and mechanical roles over the next three years. Dr Tuffy provided details on the Innovation and Skills Centres set up to support industry and provide a catalyst for new products and process development and industry growth.

The Business Support Centre hopes to continue and build growth in all these areas and seek opportunities to secure funding.

Dr Tuffy left the meeting at this juncture.

Dr C O'Mullan introduced Ms W Gibbons, Project Officer, North West Tertiary Education Cluster.

Presentation – North West Tertiary Education Cluster (NWTEC)

Ms W Gibbons provided an overview of the work of the North West Tertiary Education Cluster which has been in operation since 2018. The Cluster partners are Ulster University, Atlantic Technological University, Donegal Education and Training Board and the North West Regional College. The collaborative efforts of the Cluster are aimed to bring greater

coherence to the education and skills provided by the four partners and further develop the research and innovation capacity of the North West region.

Ms Gibbons apprised the meeting of the aims, the framework for strategic alliance and the areas of collaboration of the NWTEC. A summary of the targets set and the achievements to date were noted together with the strategic collaborations and partnerships that have been established.

Dr C O'Mullan introduced Ms F Moran, Sustainability Champion to the meeting.

Presentation – Embedding Sustainability at North West Regional College

Ms Moran provided information on the College key sustainable development goals from the United Nations goals. The pillars for delivery include cross College, the curriculum and partnerships. Progress to date was noted with the key priorities and the current work in this area within the College. Project examples together with student projects were provided for Governors to review.

The Governing Body Chair thanked all the individuals who made presentations and welcomed Ms J Sweeney, Project Director GEMX North West to present.

Presentation – Generating Engineering & Manufacturing Excellence (GEMX)

Ms Sweeney provided background on the journey of GEMX, an industry led collaborative network of innovative companies and educational institutes in the North West. GEMX was set up in April 2022 and is supported by Invest NI. The aim of GEMX is to inspire and generate engineering and manufacturing excellence. The objectives are to raise the profile of manufacturing and engineering, to develop a pipeline of talent and to encourage innovation. A number of working groups have been established. The working groups include a range of people from industry and education to identify opportunities and take positive action. Ms Sweeney shared some of the work completed to date as well as the planned work ahead.

Mr S Gillespie joined the meeting during this item. Ms W Gibbons, Ms F Moran and Ms J Sweeney left the meeting at this juncture.

A break was taken at this juncture and the meeting reconvened at 13:00.

The Governing Body Chair officially welcomed Ms L Watson, Director of Further Education (DfE) and Ms M Doherty, Deputy Secretary, Skills and Education Group.

Ms Doherty noted the importance of FE Colleges in boosting economic prosperity, their work in inclusion together with the College's strong work in partnership with its many stakeholders.

Ms L Watson stated that despite the current challenges in FE it is encouraging to see the innovation work taking place. Ms Watson acknowledged the valuable asset of staff.

Mr F Smyth, Governor noted the governance demands from the Department on the College despite a very difficult operational period. Ms Doherty, Deputy Secretary noted that every department operates a different governance regime; however, she assured the Board that the Department (DfE) will look positively and critically at the returns requested from the

Sector and endeavour to streamline some of the requests. The Deputy Secretary added she would be happy to have a conversation with the College on this matter. Ms L Watson, Director of FE added that she considered the new Partnership Agreements and Engagements Plans will help to progress this.

In response to Mr Smyth's further question, Ms Watson reported that the Department's key priorities for the next twelve months will be the successful delivery of the staff exit scheme, to launch the second stage of the FE Review and progress made on curriculum optimisation and workforce issues.

Ms Toland, Staff Governor asked if there was opportunity in the FE review to look at the pay parity between lecturers and teachers. Ms L Watson replied that there is work underway with a proposal that one of the key workstreams will be around workforce. Pay and conditions will be an element of this workstream. Ms Toland replied it was encouraging to hear this and thanked the Director.

In response to Mrs Gormley's question, Ms Watson provided a timeline on the FE review. A programme of work is being developed for a number of workstreams for 2024/25. A strategic plan will then be drawn up for the following year. Ms Doherty added the approach will be co-design as equal, trusted partners with opportunity to make changes to improve as matters progress.

Mr Smyth highlighted the importance of recognising the value to our learners. This is measurable and should be considered into what a College does when considering taking costs out. Ms Doherty responded that the learner is at the centre and focus needs to look at alternative income sources and ways of generating value.

Discussion on the Reform to Save Scheme took place. Ms L Watson provided detail on the launch of the Scheme within the Sector. Within the Business Case there is potential to allow 260 staff to exit from the Sector this year. Thanks was extended to Ms Kelly, HR Manager who is managing the process in the College. Ms Kelly reported there was good input from the union side in the consultation meetings.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Ms Watson and Ms Doherty for joining the Board's Strategy Day meeting.

Ms L Watson and Ms M Doherty left the meeting at this juncture.

The Governing Body Chair sought closing comments. Mr P Clancy thanked everyone for their informative presentations. He considered it important to focus on the staff pillar within the College's purpose and strategic context. Staff are a critical part of the success of the College. Ms Toland echoed these sentiments.

It was agreed if Governors wanted to send suggestions on actions following the Strategy Day to forward these to the Governing Body Secretary. A time to discuss these will be set aside at the next Governing Body meeting.

The Governing Body Chair thanked everyone and closed the meeting at 14:11.

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

Date: 9 April 2024

APPROVED