
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND FOURTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS, COMMENCING 1800

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 1825)
Mrs M Gormley
Mrs J McKeever (until 1858)
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mrs C Shongo
Mr F Smyth
Mr P Thompson (until 1914)
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 1846)
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services (from 1819)
Mrs C O'Reilly, Boardroom Apprentice
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

104.1 WELCOME & APOLOGIES

The Governing Body Temporary Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies were received from Mr K Kennedy and Mrs S McMahan.

104.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS/DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no conflict of interest declarations. Ms V Toland stated she would like to speak on a matter under any other business. The Chair agreed to this.

104.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 26 SEPTEMBER 2023**➤ 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 J McKeever

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

REPORT 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

103.3/101.10 The Finance Director reported that as agreed at the September 2023 Board meeting he had met the individual member of staff who raised the query on the Premature Retirement Compensation Scheme. This matter is now considered closed.

104.4 GOVERNING BODY TEMPORARY CHAIR’S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó’Neill**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 1 Governing Body Self-Assessment 2022/23

Report 1.1 Governing Body Self-Assessment 2022/23 Summary

The Governing Body Chair reported on the very positive outcomes and acknowledged the work of the previous Governing Body Temporary Chair, Mrs J McKeever during this period.

88.2% of Governors responded to the Self-Assessment Exercise. For 2022/23 there was an increase in attendance at Governing Body meetings (88.6%) compared to the previous year (84.2%). There was a decrease in attendance at Committee meetings for 2022/23 (88.9%) compared to the previous year (93.7%).

Mrs Mc Keever reported the outcomes reflect the commitment in the engagement and support of members.

Discussion followed and the need to continue the strategic direction conversation was highlighted. The Governing Body Chair noted that there will be opportunity to discuss this in the upcoming Strategy Day in January 2024.

Report 2 Strategy Day 2024 – verbal

The Governing Body Chair added that the Strategy Day will be held on 19 January 2024. Ms L Watson, Director of FE, DfE will be in attendance. Suggestions were noted for the agenda items.

Ms G Moss joined the meeting during this item.

104.5 PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE’S BUSINESS – Mr L Murphy

The Principal updated the Board on some of his engagements and events. This included continued work with the SOLAS Project; meeting with DfE on the development of the FE Review. An event took place in Springtown Campus hosting the introduction of the Smart Nano NI’S new 5G Testbed. The Principal was part of a delegation who met Mr Joseph Kennedy 111, US business delegation on their visit to Northern Ireland.

Positive news was noted with the recent announcement that Vertiv, a local manufacturing facility was making a significant investment in Campsie, creating approximately 200 skilled jobs. The College will provide training through the Assured Skills Academies to Vertiv.

On the recommendation of Innovate UK, the College welcomed representatives from Scottish Colleges and the Gatsby Foundation who visited the College Business Support Centre and some of the Innovation Centres.

Mr S Gillespie joined the meeting during this item.

104.6 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Dr C O’Mullan, Head of Curriculum & Academic Standards

Dr C O’Mullan updated members in advance of the Education Committee meeting to be held on 27 November 2023. The Commissioning Letter has been received from the Department (DfE) for the revised Draft College Development Plan for 2023/24. Work is ongoing and the completed CDP is due with Department (DfE) by 11 December 2023.

As part of the Strabane Town Centre Regeneration Project, Dr C O’Mullan and Mr G Bradley (Estates Manager) will present the updated Strabane OBC, Curriculum Plan to the Pillar Board, DCSDC on 22 November 2023.

Work is underway following the introduction of All Age Apprenticeships 2024/25. Informal conversations are taking place with our SAG colleagues in relation to curriculum development and delivery.

Mitigations are being managed to maximise outcomes for students as a result of the ongoing strike action.

Report 1 Student Governor

Approval was requested for the newly elected Student Governor, Mr Ryan Godfrey to serve on the Education Committee. Mr Godfrey can join the Committee once his formal Minute of Appointment has been received from the Department (DfE).

PROPOSED, Mrs J McKeever

SECONDED, Mr B O’Neill

The Governing Body Chair thanked Dr C O’Mullan and invited Mrs D Creevy to present her report to the Board.

104.7 RESOURCES COMMITTEE – Mrs D Creevy, Committee Chair

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS - Finance papers

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| Report 1 | Committee Chair’s Summary Report of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 6 November 2023 |
| Report 2 | Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting |
| Report 3 | Management Accounts for the 3 Months to 31 October 2023 |
| Report 4 | Budget 2023/24 |
| Report 5 | Fees & Charges Policy 2024-2025 |
| Report 6 | Bad Debt Write-Off |
| Report 7 | Management Statement/Financial Memorandum (link) |

- **Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 6 November 2023**

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 B O'Neill

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

- **Report 4 Budget 2023/24**

The Board were apprised on the main changes to the Budget 2023/24, DfE Grants, Step Up funding of (£850K). There have been positive enrolments in Traineeships which has led to an increase in funding. Additional funding for Skill Up (£200k) and Skills Focus (£170k) has been awarded.

Other Grant Income was showing a decrease of £310k, reflected mainly in lower planned International Projects and a reduction in Prince's Trust income.

Other Operating Income, showing an increase of £546k, mainly driven by income related to the new Food Hubs and vending services that had previously been operated by OCS.

As a result of the current strike action by UCU academic staff, savings have been made in relation to staff costs. It was suggested in Committee that these funds could help towards supporting students with learning lost at a later date.

Premises and IT were showing an increase of £904k, mainly reflecting an increase in IT spend (£662k) to bring forward the Summer 2024, PC refresh.

The NDPB format for the 12 Months to 31 March 2024 is showing a break-even position.

Members were content to approve the Budget 2023/24

PROPOSED, Mrs S Fisher

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

The Finance Director reported that following the Resources Committee meeting held on 6 November 2023 the College received a request to meet OHMG Construction in respect to the Springtown Redevelopment Project. The College has agreed to meet without prejudice.

- **Report 5 Fees & Charges Policy 2024/2025**

Fees & Charges Policy 2024/25 – amendments include that the minimum deposit of 25% will be required for all fees other than full-time HE & International.

PROPOSED, Mrs S Fisher

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

- **Report 6 Bad Debt Write-Off**

None of the individual debts totalling £6,871.43 are over £2k.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

➤ **Report 7 Management Statement/Financial Memorandum 2018**

The Department (DfE) has confirmed there have been no changes to the document in the last year. Work continues with the Partnership Agreement which will replace the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum.

The Committee Chair reported to the Board that the Committee received a presentation from Mr G Bradley, Estates Manager on 'Climate Change Reporting'. There are new reporting duties for specified public bodies (Section 42 Climate Change Act). This will be governed by the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA). The College will need to establish its carbon baseline and intend to appoint an external advisor in this capacity. The College has introduced several housekeeping measures that have had a positive impact on energy consumption and cost.

The College have appointed Tugan Solicitors to carry out an initial review on the Northland Building (PFI). Tugans will provide a subsequent report relating to the contract with Northwin.

The Prompt Payment figure for the 30 days to 31 October 2023 to was 91% and for the year to date was 93%. The target is 95%. A staff member from the Finance Team has been absent which has impacted on these results.

Ms S Kelly joined the meeting during this item.

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS – Staffing papers**

Report S1 Health & Wellbeing Brochure Semester 1 – link

Report S2 HR Services Management Annual Report

Report S1 Health & Wellbeing Brochure Semester 1 – link

Members were encouraged to read the Health & Wellbeing Brochure with a range of activities and workshops to promote physical and physiological health.

In reporting on the Staffing matters the Committee Chair apprised the Board that in relation to recruitment data, from 5 September 2023 to 19 October 2023, a total of seven recruitment exercises were carried through to outcome. There are currently 51 'live' posts going through the recruitment and selection process.

Absence, Lost Time Rate, Teaching staff absence had increased to 2.64% for September 2023 against 2.34% for September 2022. In relation to Support staff there was also an increase showing 4.37% for September 2023 against 3.49% for September 2022. Surgery was the main reason for absence for September 2023, (16.6%) followed by musculoskeletal (12.3%).

During 2022/23 academic year, 709 staff members (88.9%) attended at least one staff development activity throughout the academic year. 55% were Academic and 45% were Support staff.

Report S2 HR Services Management Annual Report September 2022 – August 2023

During 2022/23 there were 160 posts advertised within the College with 58 permanent appointments and 33 temporary appointments. 88.75% of posts were recruited within 5 weeks and 98.13% of applicants received their interview outcome within one week of interview. Attendance – 3.3 days were lost across College, a slight increase compared to the previous year which was 2.8 days. Staff Development – 472 Staff Development applications were submitted, actioned and funded were applicable. Eighteen employees successfully completed their Certificate in Teaching qualification.

The HR Manager reported to the Board that the College had the lowest turnover of staff and the lowest sickness absence within the Sector during this period. The Board wished to acknowledge the positive report and record their appreciation of the staff commitment despite the current challenges, in particular with the ongoing issues over pay settlements for academic staff.

Ms V Toland reported that staff morale is low, however staff welcome the staff development opportunities. Staff have raised the request for management to consider offering staff development provision at a higher level. Dr C O’Mullan responded that in align with curriculum development the Continued Professional Development Policy will be reviewed and this request noted.

Thanks were passed to the HR Manager and her team on the extensive work as detailed within the Report.

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS – Client Service papers**

Report C1 Equality Report

Report C2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Report C1 Equality Report

Feedback was formally received from the Equality Commission following the submission of the Annual Progress Report in August 2023. This included the progression of work to obtain the RNIB Visibility Better Employer Standard and the signing up to the Race at Work Charter.

The first meeting of the Sector Equality Group took place on 19 October 2023.

The College received Disability Positive AAA Accreditation Certificate from Disability NI.

The Principal noted that North West Migrants Forum won Charity Partner of the Year in the ‘Good for Me Good for FE’ Charity Partner awards. This category recognises a charity partner of a college who has demonstrated a significant and positive impact on the community or cause.

The College has introduced ten Asylum Seeker Scholarships which supports the studies of asylum seekers through the North West Migrants Forum.

A new Mental Health Committee has been established with representatives across the College to support staff and students.

- **Data Protection/Compliance Update**

From the period of 31 August 2023 to 6 November 2023, there was a total of six information rights requests made under the UK GDPR and Freedom of Information Act 2000.

Since 31 August 2023 there were no personal data related incidents reported to the Information Commissioner's Office. There was one potential data incident recorded on the Data Incident Register.

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

104.8 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs C Shongo, Committee Chair

- **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

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| Report 1 | Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 14 November 2023 |
| Report 2 | Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting |
| Report 3 | Report to the Audit & Risk Committee |
| Report 4 | Annual Report of the Audit & Risk Committee for the Financial Year 2022/23 to the Governing Body |
| Report 5 | NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged with Governance 2022/23 |
| Report 6 | Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2023 |
| Report 7 | Annual Report Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2023 |

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 14 November 2023

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, Ms M Breslin

SECONDED, Mr F Smyth

Report 4 Annual Report of the Audit & Risk Committee for the Financial Year 2022/23 to the Governing Body

The Board accepted the report.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

Report 5 NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged with Governance 2022/23

NIAO provided their Draft Report To Those Charged with Governance 2022/23, to the Committee outlining that it was substantially complete. The Report proposed an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. There was one priority 3 recommendation and no uncorrected misstatements identified.

Report 6 Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2023

Following the Committee meeting held on 14 November 2023 further minor updates were made (Report 1) to the Annual Report & Financial Statements (Report 6).

The Finance Director stated the Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2023 were now ready for sign-off by the Governing Body Chair and Principal & CE and will then be presented to the Department (DfE).

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Report 7 Annual Report Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2023

PROPOSED, Ms M Breslin

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

The Committee Chair noted the other highlights from the Committee meeting. These included updates on the recent review of the College Risk Register.

- (COR0002 - Impact of Reduced Enrolment Numbers) - Increase in enrolment areas
- (COR0003 - Implementation of DfE Trainee Apprentice Management System) - NWRC continue to liaise with DfE to resolve minor issues with TAMS
- (COR0007 - Failure to Maintain Financial Stability) - Budget letter 2024/25 estimated deficit £4.97m for the College relating mainly to pay and inflationary pressures
- (COR0011 - Impact of Industrial Action) - Strike action continues by UCU members.

The Committee Chair noted the Committee had received the Annual Health & Safety Report. During 2022/23 there were 82 incidents reported in 2022/23, which is in line with pre-Covid levels. There were three RIDDOR incidents reported to HSE resulting in two personal injury claims.

In concluding her Report, the Committee Chair reported on the upcoming audits confirmed for November 2023 in relation to Access NI and NIFRS. Specialised consultants have been appointed to complete a survey to determine if RAAC, (Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete) is present in College buildings.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Shongo for her report.

104.9 CORRESPONDENCE

- Correspondence was received by the Governing Body Chair on 30 October 2023 from Ms M Donald, UCU Branch Secretary NWRC. This related to a request for a moratorium on Support staff appointments. The Governing Body Chair will draft a response.
- Correspondence was received on 10 November 2023 to the Principal from Mr J Kelpie, Chief Executive, DCSDC. This related to a motion passed in Council in support of the lecturers and staff in the ongoing strike action. The Principal will draft a response.
- Email correspondence was received on 13 October 2023 addressed to Mr L Murphy,

Dr C O'Mullan and Mrs É Doherty. This correspondence was from a cohort of Foundation Degree in Integrative Counselling students and related to the quality of educational provision.

Dr C O'Mullan reported this matter had been addressed.

104.10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ms V Toland on behalf of a staff member queried why the vacant post for the Strabane Campus Manager had not yet been advertised.

It was agreed that Dr C O'Mullan reply to Ms Toland.

104.11 RESERVED BUSINESS – taken separately

The Governing Body Chair brought the meeting to a close at 1925. Reserved Business followed.

Date of next meeting: 19 January 2024

Signed; 
Prof M Ó'Neil, Governing Body Temporary Chair

Date; 09 April 2024