
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND ELEVENTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD IN THE BOARDROOM, NORTHLAND BUILDING COMMENCING 17:30

PRESENT:

Prof M Ó' Néill, Governing Body Temporary Chair
Mr P Clancy
Mrs D Creevy (joined remotely)
Mr B Dougherty
Dr S Fisher
Mrs M Gormley
Dr K Kennedy
Mrs S McMahon (until 18:38)
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mrs C Shongo
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
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

APOLOGIES – the meeting had full attendance

111.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Temporary Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. A special welcome was extended to Mr B Dougherty who was attending his first Governing Body meeting in the capacity as co-opted Governor on the Board.

111.2 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 – September 2024

The Summary Register of Interests was updated during the summer period.

111.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 19 JUNE 2024**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

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

PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

110.5 External Board Effectiveness Review – The Governing Body Chair updated members that the reviews of the Sector Colleges are likely to take place next year.

110.6, Report 1 As agreed at the June 2024 Board meeting, the Governing Body Chair sent correspondence to Ms Moran, Lecturer and Sustainability Champion. Ms Moran sent a letter of thanks and appreciation to the Chair and the Board.

110.6, Report 2 An update was provided to the Board that Mr P Clancy and Mr B O’Neill will attend the Royal Irish Academy and Hume Foundation Deputation to Council on 1 October 2024.

111.4 GOVERNING BODY TEMPORARY CHAIR’S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó Néill**Report 1 Committee Chair’s Meeting**

A meeting was held with the Governing Body Chair, Committee Chairs and the Governing Body Secretary on 2 September 2024. It was a useful exercise. Suggestions were made to improve Committee business. These meetings will continue to be held periodically.

Report 2 Governor Assessments

The Governing Body Chair updated Governors on the current process of undertaking the Governor Assessments. He thanked all Governors for their contribution and support.

Report 3 External Board Effectiveness Review Update

Already reported under Report 1, 110.5.

Report 4 CEF Update

The Governing Body Chair noted that the CEF review is expected to be concluded shortly.

Report 5 Governor News

The Governing Body Chair congratulated Governor, Mr P Clancy who had recently completed a charity cycle from Paris to Nice for Pieta House.

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

The Principal reported that on 18 September 2024 he was one of the key signatories of the financial deal for the City Deal. This includes the new campus build in Strabane.

The Principal added it is hoped that the pause on the Growth Deals in respect to the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council will be lifted.

The Draft Programme for Government 2024-2027 has been issued. The College has commenced work on some of the immediate priority areas within the Programme relating to the areas of, 'ending violence against women and girls' and 'better support for children and young people with special educational needs'.

The Principal's recent engagements include meetings with stakeholders within the North West Tertiary Education Cluster to create better pathways and building capacity across sectors.

Initial conversations with Kerry Education and Training Board have commenced to share and explore innovative curriculum and knowledge exchange.

As a member of the NI Skills Council the Principal was in attendance at a meeting with the Economy Minister, Mr Conor Murphy who spoke on the recently launched Digital Skills Action Plan for 2024-34.

111.6 GOVERNING BODY SECRETARY'S BUSINESS**Report 1 Staff Governor Election – verbal report**

The Governing Body Secretary reported that she is leading and planning the Support Staff Governor election process and shared the key dates with the Board.

The Student Governor Election result will be available on 14 October 2024.

The Governing Body Chair highlighted the importance of the student voice on the Board and looks forward to welcoming the elected student governor.

A discussion took place on the Boardroom Apprentice Programme. It was noted that recent communication received from Ms E Mullan, Founder Boardroom Apprentice reported that the Executive Office are unable to commission a Boardroom Apprentice Programme for 2025.

- **It was agreed that the Governing Body Secretary correspond with the Department (DfE) to voice the Board's support for this programme.**
- **It was agreed to share with Governors the outcomes of any analysis of the Boardroom Apprentice Programme.**

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

111.7 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 10 September 2024
Report 2	Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting
Report 3	Report to the Audit & Risk Committee
Report 4	Committee’s Terms of Reference
Report 4.1	Summary of Proposed Changes to the Terms of Reference
Report 5	Internal Audit Plan and Charter 2024/25

The Committee welcomed Mr McCole, IT Services Manager to the meeting. Mr McCole provided a comprehensive overview on Cyber Security and was pleased to report that the College received their Certificate of Assurance for Cyber Essentials Plus on 23 August 2024.

Mr McCole apprised the Committee on GovAssure, a UK Government cybersecurity assurance scheme designed to enhance the resilience and security of organisations. The Sector will commence work in achieving this standard.

- **It was agreed to share Mr McCole’s presentation with the full Board.**

In Committee, the Finance Director reported on the Corporate Risk Register with Some minor proposed amendments.

Risk COR0001 – Impact on performance/availability of information relating to third party hosting

Upgrades have been made on the server to enhance processing performance and to future-proof the environment as new apps are added into future versions of EBS. It is expected that this risk will be removed from the Risk Register at the next full review.

Risk COR0003 – Implementation of DfE Trainee Apprentice Management System (TAMS)

The TAMS data migration issue over the summer has been resolved. It is expected that this risk will be removed from the Risk Register at the next full review.

Risk COR0007 – Failure to Maintain Financial Stability

The initial budget allocation for the upcoming year is £32,891k. While the budget allocation appears encouraging, it is important to note that the public sector is likely to face a challenging financial environment going forward. The score under this risk has therefore been reduced.

The Internal Auditor presented to the Committee the Internal Audit Report & Opinion Year Ended 31 July 2024. It was noted that overall, there is a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control within the College. During 2023/24, five reviews took place all receiving satisfactory assurance. Actions agreed were listed with three medium and thirteen low priority issues across the five assurance reviews.

The External Auditor in Committee advised that work is well progressed with the March year end audit in relation to the Department's (DfE) group accounts. The 31 July 2024 College audit work will then commence.

Prompt payment for 30 days to 31 August 2024 was 95%.

The Committee Chair reported that following the Self-Assessment Exercise that the Committee undertook in May 2024, it was agreed that the Committee Chair reply to the Director of FE to re-establish the DfE, Audit & Risk Chair's Forum. It was considered it would be useful to share good practice and to facilitate collaboration with other fellow Colleges.

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on
10 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, Mr B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mr F Smyth

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

The final Business Case for Holiday Pay was submitted to DfE in July 2024. This Business Case is seeking approval to commence the payment of holiday pay on Excess/Overtime. A separate Business Case is being prepared that is considering the back payment of holiday pay on Excess/Overtime on the back of the Supreme Court judgement (Agnew vs PSNI) in 2023. The College is currently carrying a provision for this.

Report 4 Committee's Terms of Reference

Report 4.1 Summary of Proposed Changes to the Terms of Reference

The Board were content to approve the amended Committee's Terms of Reference.

PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 5 Internal Audit Plan and Charter 2024/25

Four proposed reviews and an advisory review will take place on Environment, Social and Governance (ESG) during 2024/25. The plan is agile.

It was suggested in Committee that the Finance Director have a discussion with the SAG Finance Directors on further advisory work to take place on specific areas such as emerging risks/further efficiencies.

PROPOSED, Mr B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

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.

111.8 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Mr P Clancy, Committee Chair**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 1	Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting held on 17 September 2024
Report 2	Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting
Report 3	DfE CDP Commissioning Letter – 15 August 2024
Report 4	Business Support Centre Update
Report 5	Curriculum Overview

The Committee Chair highlighted key points from the September Education Committee meeting. He noted and thanked Dr C O'Mullan who had provided the Committee meeting with a comprehensive overview of the curriculum (Report 5).

The National Student Survey (NSS) has been published for 2023/24 final year, HE students. The College has achieved the highest response rate and outcomes in the Sector. The College also achieved much higher than average and NI outcomes in a range of aspects of the survey. The overall student satisfaction rate for the College was 92.52% vs the Sector average of 79.58%. These positive outcomes were noted and reflects the work taking place by all the staff involved.

- **It was agreed to officially communicate this positive news with the Department (DfE).**

The Committee Chair was pleased to report that following the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) audit on 16 April 2024 in relation to access arrangements for students with additional needs, the Learning Link were found to be fully compliant and there were no recommendations.

The Committee were appraised on the CDP Enrolment Target progress at the end of July 2024 for the 2023/24 academic year. HE, HLA, FE and ES actuals were all slightly below target. Retention issues may have a reflection on the data showing at the end of the academic year, ie July 2024. TFS/AppNI total was above target. The new programme 'Step Up' exceeded enrolment targets.

In relation to the Enrolment Targets for 2024/25 as of 16 September 2024 were showing a very positive picture of full-time enrolments vs plan for 2024/25. This reflects a number of factors including a slight uplift in demography, the normalisation of grading for exam results and an ongoing promotion of the value of professional and technical qualifications.

The courses scheduled across campuses for 2024/25 that have been withdrawn were listed. The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards noted that all students involved were contacted and redirected to another College course.

Further funding has been received to secure further participation in skills competitions.

In reporting on the Quality Reports, the College are continuing to work with the present QIP format, pending a less stringent formal reporting schedule to the Department (DfE) going forward. The new approach should link in with expectations of ETI around quality improvement and the CDP.

The updated version of the WCQIP was presented to the Committee for discussion. Actions completed were noted along with several updated actions.

The Committee received the Equality Update. Key work and events that have taken place to raise equality awareness were highlighted. The College had representation at the Foyle Pride event on 24 August 2024. The College three designated charities received funds this year from contributions raised by staff and students over the year.

The Committee Chair noted that the Department (DfE) agreed to undertake an independent review of student support for Further Education participants. Funding has not increased in disability support in eight years, despite increasing demand.

The Head of Client Services welcomed the review and provided details on the current challenges in managing the fund. She was encouraged that one of the recommendations from the review was to consider expanding the definition of students supported by the ASF (Additional Support Fund) to include those students who do not have a registered learning difficulty or disability but require support.

An action arising from the Education Committee meeting was for the Estates Team to look at the options available for a designated common room for HE Students.

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on
17 September 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, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Report 3 DfE CDP Commissioning Letter – 15 August 2024

The correspondence noted the discussion at a DfE workshop on the CDP and Quality Improvement Planning processes. This follows concerns raised by Colleges in regard to duplication of reporting. A number of changes have been made to the 2024/25 CDP template. The CDP will be mapped to the Minister's key objectives as part of the new Economic Vision.

Report 4 Business Support Centre Update

The Business Support Centre Update was noted.

Report 5 Curriculum Overview

The Curriculum Overview was provided to Board members which provided a comprehensive overview of the curriculum. This includes the strategic context, the range of curriculum provision and progression pathways, the Sector activity in 2022/23 and the demography of enrolments.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Clancy and invited Mrs Creevy to present her report to the Board on the business of the recent Resources Committee meeting.

111.9 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 11 September 2024
Report 2	Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting
Report 3	Statement of Comprehensive Income and expenditure for the Year Ended 31 July 2024
Report 4	Equality & Good Relations Progress Report (Section 75) April 2023 – March 2024
Report 5	Equality Report
Report 6	Data Protection/Compliance Update
Report 7	Foodovation Presentation Slides

The Committee welcomed a presentation provided by Ms S Graham, Foodovation Centre Manager (Report 7).

Reporting on the Estates matters, Springtown Redevelopment Project, since the Committee meeting the Finance Director reported that correspondence has been received from OHMG Solicitors stating that additional costs of £4,300 +VAT will settle the final account.

Estates have completed several minor projects in recent months. In terms of capital projects an Outline Business Case (OBC) is being developed for the refurbishment/upgrade of the existing assembly hall in the Strand Building.

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, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

Report 3 Statement of Comprehensive Income and expenditure for the Year Ended 31 July 2024

The Annual Report and Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the Accounts Direction and relevant accounting standards. The College submitted the Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements to the Department (DfE) on 20 September 2024. In terms of the March year end, audit work is in progress and the audit for the 31 July 2024 commenced on 23 September 2024.

The Department (DfE) Grants showed a positive variance. This mainly related to the Voluntary Service Scheme and the Step-Up Programme funding. Pension figures within the Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure and the Statement of Financial Position relate to the NILGOSC Scheme. This is currently showing as a pension asset.

The Holiday Pay Provision estimate for the back dated payments has increased slightly to (£1.08m). The in-year Business Case has been submitted for holiday pay.

Updating the Board on College Insurance the addendum to the 2021 approved Business Case was approved by DfE in July 2024. This gave approval and additional budget cover to purchase full insurance for 2024/25. The Sector premium for 2024/25 totals £1,662k, up £73k (4.6%) on the 2023/24 premium of £1,589k. The development of the Business Case for the 5-year period from 2025/26 is continuing. The College has appointed ABL Insurance to prepare a report on the possible options available, including reviewing claims history and potential risks going forward.

The Finance Director provided further details on the work undertaken on self-insurance/partial self-insurance options.

Mrs S McMahon left the meeting during this item.

The Committee Chair then reported on the Staffing matters that were brought through the Committee meeting on 11 September 2024. Since 1 September 2023 the College has advertised a total of 126 posts. 76 of these were Support posts.

A review of the recruitment process for Band 3 and 4 posts was undertaken by the Recruitment Team. Following feedback, the HR Team will implement changes to try and increase applications to the College. It was suggested that it might be useful to issue the survey to individuals who applied for posts but were not successful.

Sickness absence rates show an increase in sickness within the College in the last academic year 2023/24 from 2022/23. The application of the Voluntary Severance Scheme had an impact on levels of absence during 2023/24. The largest cause of absence within the College was personal stress and surgery.

During 2023/24, 604 staff members attended at least one staff development activity throughout the academic year. From September 2023 to August 2024, 439 Staff Development applications have been received and processed by the HR Team. The Staff Learning & Development Policy is currently being reviewed.

The HR Team will be working on developing a new online appraisal form which will be easier to access and will be more user friendly. A CPD report will also be available for managers to allow them to monitor and track CPD hours for staff.

The update on completion rates at August 2024 on the mandatory training modules show slight decreases in completion rates over the summer period due to staff holidays and technical difficulties with the Canvas system. From October 2024 staff will be required to complete the mandatory Cyber Awareness module on an annual basis following a recent IT audit recommendation.

Report 4 Equality & Good Relations Progress Report (Section 75) April 2023 – March 2024

The Report has been sent to the Equality Commission and captures the extensive work of the staff on the College's commitment to its equality scheme and to the promotion of equality.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Report 5 Equality Report

Members noted the Report.

Report 6 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Requests for information for 2023/24 increased by 36% from the previous academic year. The main increase was in relation to Freedom of Information Requests. There were a total of 14 data incidents reported to the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer. This was a slight decrease (7%) on previous year's figures. In August 2024 the management of compliments and complaints has been transferred to the Data Protection & Information Compliance Officer.

111.10 CORRESPONDENCE

Correspondence was received on 26 June 2024 from CEA regarding updates on the results in August, this was forwarded to Governors on 2 July 2024.

Correspondence was received on 26 July 2024 from Ms L Watson, Director of FE, DfE to introduce Ms Wilson as Head of the FE Corporate Governance & Accountability Division. Ms Wilson attended her first Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 10 September 2024.

111.11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Ms V Toland, Staff Governor was delighted to notify the Board that a College student was awarded a scholarship funded by JP McManus.

111.12 RESERVED BUSINESS

Taken separately.

Date of Next Meeting; 20 November 2024

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

Signed, *M Ó'Neill*
Prof M Ó'Neill, Governing Body Temporary Chair

Date, 20 November 2024

APPROVED