

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 1 April 2020 by Skype, commencing at 5.00pm.

Present: Mrs I Allison, Mr K Chambers, Mr R Cochrane, Ms A Dynes, Mr W Hutchinson, Dr D Lennox (Chair), Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr W McCluggage, Mrs G McConnell, Mr I Murphy and Prof T Scott.

In Attendance: Mrs M Donnelly, Mr M Higgins, Mr P O'Neill, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace, Secretary.

94.1 Apologies and Welcome

Dr Lennox assumed the position of Chair for the meeting. Apologies were received for Mrs Eve.

94.2 Declarations of Interest

None.

94.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 18 March 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Mr McCluggage Seconded: Ms Dynes

94.4 Matters Arising

None.

94.5 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

Members noted letter advising current contact arrangements for DfE.

Members noted communication from the Permanent Secretary for the Department of Finance (DoF) outlining payment arrangements for suppliers. In response to a query from Mr Murphy about suppliers potentially seeking to benefit from different Government schemes, Mr Higgins advised on the contract arrangements with suppliers and the College's entitlement to inspection of suppliers' records in line with the guidance for supplier relief due to COVID-19. An update on progress with procuring the internal audit contract would be provided to the Audit & Risk Committee.

The Chair reported that he had again raised the vacant Chair position with the Director of FE within the Department and advised her on interim arrangements involving the Chairs of the three Committees to support the Chief Executive. The GB would be advised once a decision had been made by the Minister.

94.6 Principal's Report / Management Accounts

Prof Scott spoke to her presentation on 'Covid-19 - contingency planning and maintaining operations'. Members noted information on the planning timeline and communications to date, preparations taken to move curriculum operations online and positive metrics for resultant engagement by staff and students.

Prof Scott reported that Principals had met with the Department at the end of March to highlight the impact and concerns on the uncertainty around vocational qualifications. She stated that the Department had established a Task and Finish group to look at vocational qualifications and referred to a letter from the Principals to Mr Wilkinson the Director of Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division (previously circulated) expressing serious concerns and proposed solutions to this issue. Mr O'Neill confirmed the steps taken by the curriculum staff to develop predicted grades and to continue to deliver aspects of the curriculum on-line.

Members noted plans to extend provision of online training for staff, with provision of ongoing communications to staff, students and stakeholders, overseen by the Head of Marketing and Communications. Prof Scott indicated that procurement of a web chat system for the College was being considered, in the absence of a central phone number. She commended staff on work carried out over this difficult period and noted especially the efforts of the SLT, IT and CILT teams that ensured as many staff as possible could work remotely. The Chair thanked Prof Scott for the comprehensive presentation and the extent and speed of the response by the College to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Prof Scott summarised the status of the estates and new build project and members noted information on the most economically advantageous tender (MEAT), the decant project, the tender process for Ballymena new build and the Gateway review. Prof Scott extended thanks to the Project Board and to Mr McCluggage and Mr Murphy for their work on the review and advised that the report would be available at the next Project Board meeting.

Mr Higgins presented the financial update to 9 March 2020. He reported that Colleges had submitted a funding bid to the Department to purchase additional IT resources to deal with the Covid-19 situation. Members' concerns around potential for fraudulent activity by contractors was noted, Mr Higgins confirmed audit arrangements in place which allow the College to ensure compliance with COVID-19 guidance.

94.7 Education Committee

Prof Scott confirmed that submission date for the Curriculum Development Plan remained at 30 June 2020 and noted that delaying a decision on vocational qualifications could impact on student progress and also future recruitment.

Prof Scott reported that the ETi inspection had been formally postponed.

94.8 Sector Safeguarding Policy

The NI FE Safeguarding Care Welfare Policy was welcomed and approved unanimously by members.

94.9 Any Other Business

Mr McCluggage advised that an additional Audit & Risk Committee meeting had been convened for 20 April 2020.

94.10 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed that a further meeting, to be held by Skype, should take place week commencing 27 April 2020.

ACTION: The Secretary would arrange a suitable date for a further meeting in April and inform members.

The meeting ended at 6.50pm.



B McGahan _____

Date 29.04.2020

(Chair)

29 April 2020



Mrs K Wallace _____

(Secretary)