

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 2 October 2024 in Causeway campus commencing at 2.30pm.

The meeting was preceded by the Causeway Campus Official Opening Ceremony and tours of the building.

Present: Mr K Nelson (Chair), Mrs L Crilly, Mr B Devlin, Dr P Graham (on Teams), Ms J Hemphill, Mr M Higgins, Mr A Hoey, Mr G McAllister, Mr D MacAuley, Ms D McIlwaine (on Teams), Mr R McKernan (on Teams), Mrs P Martin, Mr I Murphy, Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin, Mr D Small, Mrs J Taggart

Apology: Mrs McGovern

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown, Mr S Lavery

Also in attendance: Ms Moira Doherty, Deputy Secretary Skills and Education, and Ms Louise Watson, Director of FE

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

123.1 Welcome

The Chair welcomed the DfE representatives to the meeting along with Mr Hoey, new Student President and Student Governor.

Ms Doherty and Ms Watson were invited to address the meeting.

Representatives' Address:

Ms Doherty congratulated the College team on the earlier ceremonial event. Ms Doherty underlined that the Minister has been explicit in his ambition for FE colleges to be better utilised and the importance of continued collaborative working, both between colleges and the Department and across all six colleges. She acknowledged the collaborative approach being undertaken in relation to FE capital projects, and that FE capital delivery has been acknowledged as having a best practice approach and is an exemplar for the public sector. Referring to recent issues with the preparation of annual account and NIAO engagement, Ms Doherty expressed appreciation for assurance being provided to the Department by the College, via the Principal and GB Chair, and looked forward to the action plan as provided to the Department being fulfilled by the College to resolve this matter.

During a period of discussion with members, Ms Doherty noted the ongoing period of significant financial constraint but highlighted the scope and opportunities provided through

colleges working together. She recognised the difficulties for the sector of the last few years and noted the Department's commitment to collaboration and partnership, with other government departments and with colleges.

Ms Watson referred to the information demands being made of colleges. Whilst noting that a more refined process for aligning College Development Plans and quality planning had been put in place this year, she highlighted the limited opportunities for Chairs to come together as a group and suggested organising a strategic planning day in Autumn/Winter for DfE, GB and Committee Chairs. She also noted her support for the work of Curriculum Directors in agreeing a common quality reporting template to be used across all six colleges.

Ms Doherty expressed her appreciation for the collaboration and leadership provided by Mr Higgins, a view confirmed by the GB Chair.

Mr Nelson also referred to the College's position at the forefront of community wealth building through the NW pilot and highlighted the College's full contribution to sectoral issues, including the ongoing review of collaborative working, along with the representation at WorldSkills in Lyon.

Mr Small voiced appreciation for a very supportive DfE Minister and noted the need to change the attitude towards and perception of FE. Dr Graham suggested that more could be done by the Department towards this and further proposed a strategy day with GB members only.

Ms Doherty considered the challenge articulated as fair and noted the suggestion for a strategy day with members, which she would think on how best to coordinate. She agreed with Mr Small that the FE Review provided an opportunity to look at these issues.

Ms Watson summarised the Minister's priorities noting the first priority was agreeing FE lecturers' pay; the second and current priority as collaboration, which needed finalising before moving onto; the third priority of transformation.

Mr Higgins thanked the representatives for a frank discussion and confirmed the Department's partnership and collaboration which had enabled the very successful completion of the Causeway Campus building. He noted the GB's commitment to collaboration, and to supporting his lead on certain aspects. He considered collaboration as essential for the success of FE across the Province and confirmed the willingness of the College and members to make whatever changes were necessary to the curriculum, in the best interests of learners.

123.7 Education Committee

It was agreed to take this item next on the agenda, to facilitate Dr Graham in leaving early.

Dr Graham gave a verbal update of issues covered at the meeting on 25 September, including action plan for the annual Committee cycle; attendance at the British Council graduation ceremony; enrolment update; marketing and careers presentation; annual safeguarding report; and QIP.

Dr Graham referred to a meeting on 21 August when the QIP template was discussed and Ms Watson confirmed agreement made with sector staff at that meeting, for Curriculum Directors and Quality Managers to collectively generate a common template for use across all colleges. She also confirmed she would be happy to clarify same in the event of any ambiguity.

The Chair thanked the representatives for their attendance and contribution to the meeting.

Ms Doherty thanked members for the warm welcome provided and commended work undertaken with the Minister, students and the community by the NRC team.

The representatives left the meeting at 3.15pm.

123.2 Declaration of Interests

Members agreed that a relative of Mr Small who worked for QUB did not need to be declared as an interest.

Mr Higgins drew to members' attention that his son had joined the College as a student.

123.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 June 2024 were approved subject to a slight change to reference relating to the Department of Agriculture. The minutes would be changed.

Proposed: Mrs Murphy Seconded: Dr Graham

123.4 Matters Arising

Mr Lavery advised that a 10-year extension to the lease on the Larne campus had been agreed and was currently being worked through with legal representatives.

123.5 Chair's Communications

The Chair thanked everyone involved in the opening event. The Principal would issue a note to all staff and students involved.

Chair's Update: The Chair summarised work carried out during the period 19 June – 1 October 2024, including: meeting with the Principal of Larne Grammar School; Governor assessment meetings - the Chair thanked all involved and summarised feedback received; staff conference; Larne Community Wealth Building Pilot; Chairs' meeting in Causeway Campus; WorldSkills event in Lyon, with participation by Karla Kosch and students noted as a credit to the College and the Province and the role of the Principal as a Trustee of the organisation also

recognised; meeting with Moira Doherty and Louise Watson.

Sector approach to GB Effectiveness Review: A presentation and draft proposal were considered by members. The Principal noted the requirement in the Partnership Agreement for a review to be carried out every 3-years, which the sector had agreed to do collectively. Time would be taken to consider a Terms of Reference for the project.

GB approved the GB Effectiveness Review project as outlined.

123.6 Correspondence

NIAO Report and media release on Developing the Skills for NI's Future: Members noted these documents which would not be considered further until the PAC presentation had taken place.

Review of Collaborative Working Arrangements: DfE Letter and Terms of Reference were noted. A final report, which was due by the end of September, had not yet been received.

123.8 Principal's Report

The Principal gave a brief summary of topics in his report. In particular, he highlighted: Strategic DfE Draft Project Plan and Strategy for Government, which would be covered in the GB Strategy Day in January 2025; new funding opportunities; and student achievements. Members were asked to hold 12 December 2024 in their diaries for the College graduation in the Tullyglass Hotel, off-campus venue as requested by students.

Dr Graham clarified the rationale for his requests to the DfE representatives for a members' only strategy day and on agreement re the QIP template.

Dr Graham left the meeting at 3.33pm.

Mr Small acknowledged achievements made in cyber security and noted the work put in over this 18-month long project.

123.9 Audit & Risk Committee

Mrs Martin gave a verbal update of issues covered at the meeting on 30 September 2024 including: progress on recruitment and scheduling of electrical installation course; College performance data - members heard that Ms Kerr had left the College and noted opportunities to review this role; Internal Audit reports; Draft Audit Plan; new Head of Finance; Accounts and resources brought in to manage; external audit, with the NIAO team currently on-campus.

Mrs Martin confirmed that she had now stepped down as Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee and proposed that Mr Small take up the role. A new Vice-Chair would be sought at the next meeting of Committee.

GB was content for Mr Small to assume the role of Audit & Risk Committee Chair.

Members noted work being carried out by the College to deliver NIAO requirements and acceptance of the need to flex the Committee meeting schedule. No feedback had yet been received from the Department on mid-year assurance, and the view of the committee that red risks in the risk register needed re-categorisation to more clearly show movement was noted.

The NRC Accounts Action Plan was noted.

The Chair thanked Mrs Martin for her report and work as Chair for the Committee. Members noted her inclusive and welcoming leadership model on this most demanding of Committees.

The Chair also thanked the Principal and Mr Lavery for work carried out on the accounts to get to the current position.

In response to a question by Mr Patterson, the Principal confirmed the impact on lecturer recruitment as a result of the recent salary increase, noting a number of trades still presented difficulties. It was hoped that work on parity of pay with teachers might help.

123.10 Finance Update

Mr Lavery took members through the update and outlined funding bids submitted for AI and ESG. Members noted that further details on 3-year non-baseline funding bids would go to the next Resources meeting on 14 October.

In response to members' questions, Mrs Brown and Mr Lavery explained the basis of the maximum student number funding request and noted that resource bids would focus on software licensing and staffing costs. Mr Lavery also confirmed that most of the capital money requested for new builds had been received.

Mr Hoey left the meeting at 3.50pm.

123.11 Draft Mid-Year Assurance Statement

Consideration was given to this document which had been presented to Audit & Risk and shared with DfE. No feedback had yet been received from the Department. The Principal highlighted that issues not fully compliant had been highlighted, to ensure open and transparent reporting.

123.12 College Development Plan

GB noted the draft CDP, which now awaited feedback from DfE. A final draft of this document, incorporating a new format and new KPIs, would come to GB in November.

The Principal responded to members' queries on total learner numbers; external funding proposals; work on local action plans whilst ensuring no duplication. Possibilities for work with universities and on DfE interventions would be picked up in November.

In response to a question from Mr Small, Mr Lavery confirmed an expectation that the College would be required to reduce its carbon footprint.

123.13 New Build Update

The update to 2 October 2024 was noted.

Members heard a proposal for a Liquor Licence application for Causeway Campus, to allow catering students to do full silver service training, with all appropriate safeguarding in place.

Mrs Crilly and Mr Murphy would check whether they were permitted to be on the application by their professional bodies.

Members were otherwise content for the application to proceed, subject to confirmation by Mrs Crilly and Mr Murphy.

123.14 Any Other Business None.

123.13 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 27 November 2024.

The meeting ended at 4.17pm.

Mr K Nelson



Date 27 November 2024

Chair

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary