

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

GDPR Training

Governing Body members received training on GDPR from Ms Olivia O’Kane, Carson McDowell from 4.00-5.00pm, prior to the full Governing Body meeting.

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 13 November 2019 in Newtownabbey campus, commencing at 5.30pm.

Present: Mrs I Allison, Mr K Chambers, Mr H Crossey, Mr R Cochrane, Ms A Dynes, Mr W Hutchinson, Mr R Jay, Dr Lennox, Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr B McCann (Chair), 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 (Observer) and Mrs K Wallace, Secretary.

91.1 Apologies and Welcome

Apologies were received for Mrs Eve and Mr Taggart.

The Chair welcomed Mr Pat O’Neill, SIB, who has joined the College in an interim support role.

91.2 Declarations of Interest

None.

91.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2019 were approved subject to noting that Mr Chambers had been present at the meeting and Mr Lennox had joined the meeting at 5.45pm.

Mr Crossey reported that the Department had asked for a change to be made to the wording under Correspondence at item 90.6 of the minutes. However, members were content that the wording represented a correct summary of the discussion.

Proposed: Mr Hutchinson

Seconded: Mr Jay

91.4 Matters Arising

In response to a query by the Chair on how the purchase of Wrightbus by Bamfords would affect the College, Prof Scott advised that the College continues to engage with Wrightbus on support measures and is seeking to identify workplaces for apprentices. The College are currently working with Invest NI and DfE to manage a cross-departmental response to the situation.

Members also noted that, following on from public engagement events arising from recent job losses, staff previously employed by Thomas Cook had approached the College to request training in Essential Skills, which would commence on 15 November.

91.5 Chair’s Communication

The Chair gave a brief summary of his activities since taking up post on 1 October and extended thanks to staff for his warm welcome. He noted the improvements to the College over the last

number of years and acknowledged the efforts of staff, and particularly the work carried out by Mr Crossey, during this time. Members noted a debt of gratitude to Mr Crossey.

In the light of the upcoming retirement of the Vice-Chair, members were invited to notify the Chair or the Secretary with their expressions of interest for the post. The appointment to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Governing Body.

91.6 Correspondence

Five items of correspondence had been received since the previous meeting.

Charitable status. The letter from the Director of FE was noted and members were updated that, during an earlier meeting with the SLT and DfE, further clarification on the status is being sought.

Self-assessment survey. The Chair noted reasons contributing to a drop in Committee attendance over the past year including a high volume of additional meetings (outside of committee meetings) which required governor attendance and the geographical spread of meeting venues across College campuses. Members did, however, also recognise the benefits of meeting at the various campuses and noted the need for full attendance at Committees, especially in the light of reducing governor numbers, to ensure meeting quorums.

Mr Murphy confirmed that the Resources Committee would consider the survey results in more detail, seek feedback on the survey results from governors, agree proposed actions required and bring back to a future Governing Body meeting.

ACTION: Resources Committee to consider feedback and revert.

Future year financial position – ALBs. The letter from the Permanent Secretary was noted.

Resources budget for 2020/21. The letter from the Director of FE in advance of meetings with Chairs and Principals/Chief Executives, was noted.

ACTION: Mr Higgins will prepare a paper on the implications of further reductions for the College and provide the Chair with the initial CDP report showing budget scenarios previously outlined, to give a strategic basis for the Chair's discussions with the Department on 29 November.

Members noted that the bilateral meeting would take place in February 2020 and the need for early decisions to be made based on curriculum provision and staff use and considering challenging cuts already faced, the changing environment for FE and pressures of staffing budget.

Competition for new Governing Body Members. The Chair had received a letter outlining plans for recruitment of new governors for the College in 2020. The Chair would provide details of current skills and other information requested by the Department, based on governors' 2018/19 assessments. The need for someone with educational background experience was particularly highlighted.

91.7 Principal's Report

The Principal's Report was taken as read. Prof Scott highlighted the College's successful application to deliver a fourth CNC Academy; events planned to align with Global Enterprise Week; the further success of Samuel Gilmore in being awarded European Apprentice of the Year; Graduation – Fellowship awards; and Creative & Innovative Learning Team activities and support from the library teams was noted in the roll-out of digital skills.

Minutes of the NBPB meeting on 16 October 2019 were noted.

91.8 MSFM

Consideration was given to the Management Statement/Financial Memorandum (MSFM) which had been revised in 2018 with no further amendments, and the role of Governing Body members was noted.

91.9 Annual Report and Financial Statements

Consideration was given to the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements which been audited by NIAO and received a clean opinion.

Members' attention was drawn to a number of key focus areas including change in risk; deficit in accounts non-cash items, disclosure of members' remuneration; statement of Governing Body responsibilities; College deficit; and GB related party transactions.

Mr McCluggage outlined the NIAO's very positive report to the Audit & Risk Committee at their November meeting and noted their comments on the accounts before submitting Committee's recommendation to the Board for approval.

The Governing Body accepted the Committee recommendation and approved the 2018/19 Annual Report and Financial Statements.

Members noted that the Accounts would be submitted to NIAO for final certification on 14 November and would be laid in the Assembly on 17 December.

91.10 Financial Update

Mr Higgins talked members through the financial update at 6 November 2019, noting variance and outlining actions being taken to deliver efficiency savings in the current year. Members noted that plans to move toward the Department year-end had been extended to 2021/22.

Mr Higgins acknowledged the Chair's request for provision of summary figures and will meet with him to consider the in-year report to the Department.

ACTION: Information on forecast, estimated spend and variance will be provided to the GB going forward.

91.11 Resources Committee

Consideration was given to the draft minutes of the Resources Committee meeting on 14 October 2019. Mr Murphy advised that a meeting with Department officials had taken place prior to the GB meeting, where agreed savings achievable had been discussed; and that it was agreed that a request for funding would be forwarded to the Department on 14 November.

ACTION: Mr Murphy asked for it to be recorded that no new expenditure or commitments should be entered into by management until the Department confirmed the budget.

91.12 Education Committee

The minutes of the Education Committee meeting of 23 October were noted.

Mr Lennox gave a verbal update of the meeting held on 11 November and highlighted the volume of work and challenge involved in the upcoming inspection of FE L3 provision and the SER/QIP submission, especially given the continued absence of the VP T&L.

Mr Higgins outlined areas of work and documents still to be completed for the SER/QIP deadline of 2 December and proposed a further meeting of the Education Committee in November, to be held

by conference call. Members noted that a summary of the College's strengths, plans for improvement and an overall evaluation still had to be finalised and it was anticipated that these would be the same as the previous year, with outstanding actions from the 2018/19 plan to roll over to the 2019/20 action plan.

ACTION:

- A meeting of the Education Committee to be convened before the end of the month.
- Members authorised the Chair to sign the SER/QIP documents after approval is recommended by the Education Committee.

91.13 Audit & Risk Committee

Members noted the draft minutes of the meeting held on 19 September 2019.

Mr McCluggage gave a verbal update of the meeting held on 6 November and outlined key issues including less than satisfactory reasons provided for outstanding audit issues focused on Student Experience; NIAO's satisfaction with the draft Annual Report; and a very good health and safety presentation by Mr Leckey which showed a downward trend in health and safety issues, year-on-year. He noted that the Head of Student Experience would be asked to address outstanding issues as a priority.

91.14 Draft Fees and Charges Policy 2020/21

Consideration was given to the Draft Fees and Charges Policy and the proposal for student fees to be retained at the current level for a further year. Mr Higgins outlined an environment of declining enrolments and proposed that the fee levels be maintained.

ACTION:

- The Governing Body approved the proposal for student fees to be maintained at the current level.
- An amendment to the wording at 3.1 of the policy was noted.

91.15 Any Other Business

Mr Higgins confirmed that procurement for the new build was on track, with the PQQ questionnaire already in the marketplace. Mr Murphy also confirmed that approval was in place to progress with the refurbishment of the St Joseph's building in Coleraine.

The Chair highlighted to members that this would be the last GB meeting for Mr Crossey and Mr Jay before their retirements. Members acknowledged a debt of gratitude to Mr Crossey, particularly for his work over the past 12 months, and paid tribute to Mr Jay's contribution to the College over a term of 20 years and the loss his experience would represent to the College.

Mr Crossey and Mr Jay thanked members for their support and spoke warmly of their time with NRC, noting the positive transformation in the sector and the development of collaborative working between colleges. The progress made by the College in the last four years was recognised and Mr Crossey attributed this to the work of the Principal & Chief Executive and the SLT over this period.

91.16 Date of Next Meeting

29 January 2020 in Farm Lodge, Ballymena.

The meeting ended at 7.20pm.

Mr R McCann 

(Chair)

Date 29.02.2020
29 January 2020

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)