

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 16 September 2020 via Teams, commencing at 5.10pm.

Present: Mr B McGahan (Chair), Mrs I Allison, Mr K Chambers, Ms A Dynes, Mrs M Hamilton, Mr W Hutchinson, Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr W McCluggage, Mrs G McConnell, Mr T Montgomery, Mr I Murphy, Prof T Scott and Mr G Wilkinson

In Attendance: Mrs C Brown, Mr M Higgins, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

97.1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

The Chair expressed disappointment that due to Covid-19 restrictions, it had been necessary to move the meeting in Ballymena to an online meeting. He hoped that the November meeting could be held on-campus but this would be subject to PHA guidance.

97.2 Declaration of Interests

The Governing Body noted the updated Register of Interests, which would be included in the Annual Report & Accounts. Members were asked to notify the Secretary if they had any amendments.

97.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 June 2020 were agreed.

Proposed: Ms Dynes Seconded: Mr McCluggage

97.4 Matters Arising

Members noted that reference to the Strategic Improvement Committee had now been removed from the College website.

Mr Higgins advised that a risk workshop with senior managers will be facilitated to consider the wording within the risk register and report same to the Audit & Risk Committee.

Ms Small reported that the date for submission of the Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) had been extended. An update on the QIP would be brought to the Education Committee on 30 September.

97.5 Chair's Communication

The Chair recorded the appreciation of the Governing Body for the work of Mrs Judith Eve, who had recently finished her term with the College. Mrs Eve had asked the Chair to pass on her thanks to all members for their good wishes.

The Chair welcomed Mrs Christine Brown to her first meeting as Vice-Principal Teaching & Learning.

Members endorsed the appointment of the elected Student President, Ms Ashlyn Close, as the new student governor and thanked Ms Dynes who had agreed to act as student mentor.

Members agreed a proposal to co-opt Dr Philip Graham to the Governing Body. Dr Graham's name would be submitted to the Department for formal appointment.

ACTION: The Secretary would notify the Governing Body's decision to the Department.

The Chair reported that a strategy workshop would be held on 27 October 2020 in Beresford Avenue, Coleraine, restrictions permitting. Time to be confirmed.

Prof Scott outlined a number of areas for training that had been identified from governor appraisals. Members agreed a proposal to host a series of targeted training sessions ahead of future meetings, to be developed based on specific requirements.

ACTION: Prof Scott would have a schedule of training drawn up.

The Chair updated members on the recent College Employers' Forum meeting, following a number of discussions with Trade Unions over the summer. A report on this issue would be brought to the Resources meeting in October.

ACTION: Documentation provided to staff to be circulated to governors.

The Chair reported on a very positive visit to the Newtownabbey campus by the Economy Minister, Diane Dodds, which had taken place on 2 September 2020.

The Chair confirmed that all governor appraisals had been completed during July.

The Chair drew members' attention to Schedule 4 of the College's Instrument of Government and noted his intention that all governors should be present at meetings, subject to the conditions outlined therein.

97.6 Correspondence

Members considered the NRC Draft Risk Assessment and the revised scores were noted.

97.7 Principal's Report

The Principal's Report was taken as read. Prof Scott highlighted a number of key points including: recruitment and retention of apprentices; update on the new build; and status of student appeals. She noted that a report on Appeals would be taken to the next Education Committee.

Prof Scott thanked Ms Small and her team for their work over the summer in progressing online programmes. She also acknowledged the assistance from Mr Wilkinson and his team in DfE in facilitating the increased use of online programme delivery.

The additional £498k funding for IT resources was welcomed.

5.38 pm Mrs Hamilton joined the meeting.

Mr Wilkinson congratulated the College on the quality and responsive provision of online courses.

In relation to the decant premises in Coleraine, Prof Scott advised that the IT infrastructure would be complete by the end of September.

The Chair advised that the assurance statement on the safe resumption to College activities, signed off by himself and the Principal, was a live document and would be updated going forward.

97.8 Financial Report

Mr Higgins spoke to his report detailing Departmental bids and funding to date as a result of pressures from Covid-19. Information on a bid being developed by FE Colleges to address the impact of additional Covid-19 pressures was noted.

Mr Higgins highlighted the emergency efficiency plan which had been agreed by the Resources Committee and implemented in September. Members questioned the viability of deferring a refresh of IT and noted the potential for this to put the College in a disadvantaged position to other Colleges.

In response to a query from Mr Wilkinson, Mr Higgins confirmed that the current situation was a cause for concern and that it was hoped it would prove to be an intermediary position. Members discussed the need to consider both the extent of provision and the long-term impact of on-line learning, and distribution of investment in appropriate resources to ensure delivery capability. Mr Higgins confirmed that the College was seeking to maximise staff utilisation as far as possible.

Members noted that these issues would be considered at the upcoming strategy day and the summary finance report was noted.

97.9 College Development Plan

Ms Small spoke to the College Development Plan (CDP) Progress report and figures relating to full time enrolment, as presented. Members noted that the Departmental submission date for the 2019/20 CDP had been deferred until August.

Following clarification from Mr Wilkinson, Ms Small detailed plans to ensure lessons learned from the previous year were built into curriculum delivery, along with innovative strategies to meet evolving demand. Members noted that the Governing Body would be consulted on delivery planning over the coming months to ensure future proofing. Areas of high opportunity were noted as the College's agility in responding to the needs of adult learners and local business.

The impact of grade inflation on colleges was outlined by Prof Scot. Members noted efforts being made to increase full-time enrolments and to work with other colleges in retaining under-recruited programmes.

97.10 Any Other Business

None.

97.11 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 11 November 2020 – venue to be confirmed subject to restrictions.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 6.37pm



Mr B McGahan _____

Date 25 November 2020

(Chair)



Mrs K Wallace _____

(Secretary)