

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 29 April 2020 by Skype, commencing at 5.20pm.

Present: Mr B McGahan (Chair), Mrs I Allison, Mr K Chambers, Mr R Cochrane, Ms A Dynes, Mrs J Eve, Ms M Hamilton, Dr D Lennox, 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 M Donnelly, Mr M Higgins, Mr P O'Neill, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace, Secretary.

95.1 Welcome and Apologies

Dr Lennox welcomed Mr McGahan, recently appointed NRC Governing Body Chair, to his first meeting and thanked Governors, especially Committee Chairs, for their support of him as acting Chair over the past months. Dr Lennox also welcomed the new governors, Ms Hamilton, Mr Montgomery and Mr Wilkinson, to the meeting.

Mr McGahan thanked Dr Lennox and welcomed the new members, noting that they had all been appointed to NRC on an interim basis. Mr McGahan reported that each of the new Governors had agreed to join a Committee: Ms Hamilton would join Audit & Risk; Mr Montgomery would join Education; and Mr Wilkinson would join Resources.

Mr McGahan had spoken with all of the sitting Governors over the past week and would contact Mary Donnelly, Jenny Small, Mel Higgins and Pat O'Neill as soon as possible. He referred to his induction by the Department and noted the positive regard in which the College was held, both by the Department and the NIAO. Mr McGahan welcomed information which had been provided on the new build and the Gateway Review and looked forward to being Chair and leading the College to a very positive future.

Apologies were received for Mr Hutchinson.

95.2 Declarations of Interest

None.

95.3 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2020 were approved.

Proposed: Dr Lennox

Seconded: Mrs McConnell

95.4 Matters Arising

All matters covered by the agenda.

95.5 Chair's Communication

Members noted the letter from the Department relating to the temporary appointments to the Governing Body.

The Chair provided an update on the Departmental meeting with Chairs held on 24 April, when inter alia, the extended requirement for social distancing was referred to. Members were informed that the Department would likely establish a Task & Finish group to look at this issue.

95.6 Principal's Update

Prof Scott referred members to the substantive Covid-19 presentation, a further reiteration of the presentation considered at the Governing Body meeting on 1 April. She highlighted work being undertaken on community support and engagement and noted the College-wide volunteering initiative; status of vocational qualifications and plans being progressed for award of calculated grades to students and issues arising from different teaching terms in England and NI. Prof Scott reported very positive engagement with online and remote learning evidenced by student logins on the Canvas platform. In relation to the Coleraine new build, members noted the update on the NIE substation (due to Covid-19) which would result in an extended timeframe for the Coleraine build.

Prof Scott reported on work underway and planning for return to campuses. An update would be brought to the meeting on 30 June and any significant updates would be circulated to governors in the interim.

Prof Scott highlighted the necessity and preparedness for continuing to deliver lessons and services remotely. She recognised the opportunities for bringing more flexibility into the system and noted that results days and other events in August will not be taking place as in previous years. Mr O'Neill emphasised that some skills transfer courses were more amenable to having an online offering than others and noted ongoing work on delivery of plans to enable the physical delivery of courses requiring social distancing measures. Ms Small reported work by the Creative Learning Team to start delivery of system specific online courses in parallel with other digital delivery work. Members noted next steps in the planning process around Covid-19 and 3-month priorities.

Mr Higgins took members through the management accounts and Departmental return to 31 March 2020. He confirmed that the College had operated to budget and tolerance levels to 31 March 2020 and that the deficit to 31 July was currently on target and in agreement with year-end figures. Members noted that Mr Higgins was working with the Resources Committee on plans to manage pressures and align with the Departmental allocation to March 2020.

Mr Murphy endorsed work being carried out by Mr Higgins, SLT colleagues and the finance team in a very difficult and demanding situation and emphasised the need for additional physical IT resources.

Mr Wilkinson congratulated Mr Higgins and the team for work done in the current financial year and asked if a summary of key issues could be provided over a 3-year horizon.

ACTION: Mr Higgins will include a 3-year horizon in the high-level review considered at Resources Committee and provide that to future meetings of the Governing Body.

95.7 Correspondence

Four items of correspondence were noted:

- Budget 2020-21 – Arm's Length Bodies. Letter from the Permanent Secretary advising uplift to Departmental budget related to FE colleges.

- Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges. Letter from the Minister re FE response to Covid-19.
- Assessment and Award of Vocational Qualifications - establishment of a Task & Finish Group.
- Vocational Qualifications – Principals’ letter to the Minister re need for clarity on examinations and assessments noted. Dr McCambridge noted serious concern from curriculum side and the need for urgent guidance from the NI regulator and awarding organisations.

95.8 Audit & Risk Committee

Mr McCluggage updated members on matters considered at the meeting on 20 April 2020 and clarified the process for review of the new build project risk register, which would be integrated into the corporate risk register going forward. The additional Audit & Risk Committee focused primarily on the risks associated with Covid-19 and the mitigating actions the College was taking as a result.

95.9 Resources Committee

Mr Murphy updated members on matters considered at the meeting on 27 April 2020. He emphasised the difficult financial year which the College had undergone and commended the SLT for their management of the situation and operating within budget allocations. Mr Murphy also stressed the need for IT equipment to support students in distance learning and members also noted an issue with provision of adequate broadband coverage across the extended College catchment area.

The Chair would discuss short terms options with Prof Scott offline.

95.10 Any Other Business

None.

95.11 Date of Next Meeting

It was proposed to defer the meeting scheduled for 13 May to 17 June to consider the CDP as a single agenda item and to allow for CDP submission to DfE on 30 June 2020. The next full Governing Body meeting would continue to be held on 30 June 2020.

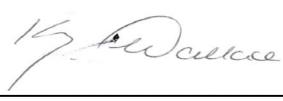
Members noted that, following the request for the mid-year assurance statement, it was intended to bring forward the next Resources Committee to a date in May. Mr Murphy and Mr Higgins would liaise on a date.

The meeting ended at 6.35pm.

Mr B McGahan  _____

Date 30 June 2020

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace  _____

(Secretary)