

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday 30 June 2021 via Teams, commencing at 5.00pm.

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

Present via Teams: Dr K McCambridge, Mr G Wilkinson

In Attendance: Mr J Woods (102.3), Mrs C Brown, Mr M Higgins, Ms J Small and Mr K Nelson

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

101.1 Apologies and Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, particularly Mr Nelson who was attending as an observer. He noted that Mr Wilkinson and Dr McCambridge would be joining virtually.

Apologies were noted for Ms Close.

102.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

102.3 Presentation

The Chair welcomed Mr Jim Woods, Project Director for the System, Technology and Services (STS) Project, who joined via Teams to provide an update on the project including timeline and challenges.

Mr Woods acknowledged performance issues faced during the development of the project. He highlighted the benefits realised to date for both students and colleges, and the support being provided by the Principals' Group, Sectoral Working Groups and all-college working groups. Members noted that work was estimated to be completed over the next 18-months and would remain within budget.

During a Q&A session, Mr Woods responded to members' questions in relation to people issues and functionality of LMS.

The Chair proposed that a formal update would be helpful to the Board in the Autumn. He thanked Mr Woods for taking the time to present to members and wished him well for the future of the project.

5.25pm Mr Woods left the meeting.

102.4 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2021 were approved.

Proposed: Mr McCluggage Seconded: Mr Murphy

102.5 Matters Arising

Referring to the Principal's move to Ulster University, the Chair advised that her resignation would take effect from 7 August 2021. The process to find a replacement would be initiated and overseen by the new Chair.

The Chair reported no further information on the launch of the governor competition being run by the Department, although interviews were expected to take place in September, with appointments to be made from December.

A new staff governor had been elected to represent the academic staff of the College. Dr McCambridge would finish her appointment on 20 July, and Mr Donal MacAuley would take over once a Letter of Appointment had been issued by the Permanent Secretary.

Members noted that a presentation on the College of the Future would be arranged for later in the year, and that governor assessment meetings had been scheduled with the new Chair.

102.6 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

In relation to sponsor arrangements, the Chair updated governors on a call with Ms Cousins and reported that there was no notification of a replacement for the Director of Further Education. Information on any interim appointment would be circulated as soon as possible.

Members noted that this would be the last meeting for Dr McCambridge, who will step down from her position as staff governor on 20 July 2021. The Chair voiced thanks to Dr McCambridge for her invaluable contribution to business over the past 5-years.

Members were advised that Ms Ashlyn Close had been re-elected as Student President for the 2021/22 academic year and would remain as Student Governor. The Chair acknowledged Ms Close for fulfilling her role over the past year with enthusiasm and vigour, and fully expected this to continue.

Attendance at recent Departmental Training was as follows:

- Effective Governance Training on 26 May 2021: Mr Chambers, Mr McCluggage and the Secretary.
- Audit Training 18 June 2021: Dr Graham and Mr Nelson.

The Chair referred to a recent communication relating to a comprehensive risk assessment process for FE colleges, carried out by the Department. Members noted the commitment from Ms Cousins to review and the Chair of the Audit & Risk and new Chair would follow up.

CPANI guidance on carrying out a skills and attributes audit had been received and would be circulated to members by the Secretary.

The Chair updated members on the current status with Lecturers' Pay negotiations. He advised that CEF would be carrying out work in the autumn, to develop a sector-wide strategy for the many changes facing the sector.

102.7 Principal's Report

The Principal spoke to her report and provided an update on a number of issues, viz:

Following his visit to Farm Lodge on 25 June 2021, the Minister for the Economy, Mr Paul Frew, has agreed to make a return visit to the College in September.

Mr Clem Athanasiou is temporarily acting as Director, Apprenticeships, Careers & Vocational Education Division, DfE. Progress has been made in Essential Skills and improved outcomes are expected.

Members were referred to the list of additional curriculum provision detailed in the report.

ACTION: The addendum of new courses for 2021/22 was approved.

Proposed: Dr Graham Seconded: Mr Murphy

The Principal reported that the virtual Management Conference on 24 June 2021 had been a very successful event, attended by 70 staff and headlined by the Permanent Secretary. The Chair endorsed the Principal's comments and noted that the technology had worked brilliantly.

102.8 CDP Progress Report

Ms Small presented a high level, interim update for members' information. She noted that a data run would take place later in the evening, which would be used to update the final report to be submitted to the Department in mid-August.

Ms Small outlined work on information sessions, which had been delivered during the first week in June and noted that she expected the final retention rate to be above target when all withdrawal numbers had been processed. A large reduction in red risks compared to June 2020 were highlighted.

In response to a member's query, the Chair advised that CEF would be looking at the value of FE colleges continuing to fulfil HE provision, an issue which was being discussed across the sector. The Principal advised that the incoming new Departmental team would take forward reviews on the 14-19 project, essential skills and HE in FE with the Permanent Secretary.

102.9 Audit & Risk Committee

Draft minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 2 June 2021 were noted. Mr McCluggage reported a robust discussion with NIAO in relation to the estimation of 7-weeks for audit and the impact on college resources.

102.10 Education Committee

Draft minutes of the Education Committee meeting on 5 May 2021 were noted.

Mrs McConnell spoke to the Safeguarding Update, which had been considered at the Education Committee meeting. Members noted information on safeguarding referrals and training, along with the continued emphasis on referring issues considered by the College to be safeguarding, to the NHSCT Gateway teams. Members welcomed the commitment to undertake a formal review and potentially extend the Northern Plus initiative.

Members recognised the needs of students in areas such as mental health and noted plans for bespoke training for students, to address these issues.

102.11 Resources Committee

Mr Murphy gave a verbal update of the Resources Committee meeting held on 23 June 2021. He highlighted that the College had worked with the Department to access funding needed throughout the year.

102.12 Budget Position Update

Mr Higgins presented the College financial update to 31 March 2021, which had been considered by the Resources Committee on 23 June.

Members noted the revised allocation, bids placed for 2021/22 for additional capital and Covid-19, and bids placed for the 10-year Investment Strategy.

Mr Higgins reported that the property maintenance contract had been awarded to Grahams, to commence operating on 5 July, and highlighted the benefits to colleges which would result from the move away from CPD Property Division. Dr Graham and Mr McGahan endorsed these remarks.

102.13 New Build Progress

The Principal advised that the 26th meeting of the Project Board had taken place earlier in the day. She referred to lessons which had been learned in relation to sharing of information and to the amount of work involved in both the Project Board and the Capital Steering Group (CSG). The Principal thanked Mr Murphy, Mr McCluggage and Mrs McConnell for representing the College on the Project Board and the CSG.

The Principal highlighted that:

- approval had been received to proceed with the additional construction process for Coleraine. Mr Mooney would work with the Department and CPD to provide required assurances. She encouraged members to view the drone footage of Coleraine on the College website.
- The recommendation on the tender for Ballymena had been accepted and very positive feedback for the College had been received from CPD and the Department.

The Chair opined that the College could not have done better on this project and gave credit to the Principal, Mr Murphy, Mr McCluggage, Mr Higgins and Mr Mooney for a very positive outcome.

102.14 Any Other Business

As the Chair presided over his last meeting with the Governing Body, the Vice-Chair expressed the appreciation and thanks of members to him for his work over the past 14 months, and for bringing stability to them as a team.

102.15 Date of Next Meeting

Consideration was given to the draft schedule of meetings for 2021/22 academic year. Any issues with dates to be notified to the Secretary.

Dates for the first meetings of Committee in the new academic year, were agreed.

The Chair apologised for technical problems experienced during the meeting, whilst noting the benefits of governors being able to join meetings both virtually and in-person.

ACTION: The Secretary to work with IT on lessons learned from the meeting and to progress a blended approach to meetings, moving forward.

The Chair thanked all members for their support and hard work during his time with the College and, especially in the light of the Covid-19 situation, for persevering, adapting and succeeding.

The Chair paid tribute to Prof Scott for her work during almost 7-years with the College. Whilst noting the many challenges she had inherited, he extolled the focus, determination, resilience and drive she had exhibited in making NRC the success it has become. As Prof Scott's tenure as Principal and Chief Executive draws to a close, the Chair recognised the legacy of modernisation, achievement and success which she would leave behind. On behalf of members and staff, he thanked her for doing an absolutely brilliant job and wished her luck in her new one.

There being no further business, the meeting finished at 6.38pm



Mr K Nelson _____

Date 6 October 2021

(Chair)



Mrs K Wallace _____

(Secretary)