

Northern Regional College

Governing Body

Minutes of the Governing Body meeting held on 20 March 2024 on Teams commencing at 5.00pm.

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

In Attendance: Mr S Lavery, Ms J Small

Mrs K Wallace, Secretary

120.1 Apologies

Mrs Brown and Mr MacAuley

120.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

120.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Dr Graham

Seconded: Mr Small

120.4 Matters Arising

The Principal reported that he will engage with other FE Colleges on a sector wide procurement to carry out board assessments for all colleges. Such an approach is welcomed by the Department.

120.5 Chair's Communication/ Correspondence

The Chair reported on his activity since the last meeting and Mr Murphy provided an update on the FE regional conference in February 2024, which had been attended by himself and Dr Graham.

5.05pm Mrs Crilly and Mr Shevlin joined the meeting

Dr Graham reported on discussion and agreement with the DfE Deputy Secretary, at the regional conference, on changes to the basis of the College QIP going forward. The Chair congratulated him on this result and Mr Small welcomed the change. Members noted that feedback on the most recent QIP submission would be provided by representatives from ETI on 28 March 2024.

The Partnership Agreement would be taken later in the meeting. The Principal advised on an upcoming meeting with the Department on 2 May 2024 when discussion would take place on revision of the Terms of Reference for the Review. Members noted a requirement within the PA for an annual visit to colleges by a representative of DfE.

Action: Louise Watson, Director of FE, would be invited to the June meeting of the GB in the Causeway campus.

The Chair advised that an invitation to Joe Kennedy III would be tied to his time in Northern Ireland. However, it was hoped he would be available for the opening of the Coleraine campus in September 2024.

The final session of safeguarding training would be held on 21 March. Any members who had not yet attended training were asked to contact the Secretary for an invitation.

120.6 Strategy Day Feedback

Ms Small spoke to the summary presentation and highlighted key themes arising from the Strategy Day on 6 February.

Members noted the feedback report provided, a minor typo in which would be amended by the Secretary.

The Chair appreciated the productive feedback by members.

120.7 Principal's Report

The Principal highlighted significant topics in his report. Members noted that, having visited the Newtownabbey campus on 28 February, the Economy Minister had declined an invitation to the Ballymena 'Topping out' ceremony in April due to a diary conflict. Governors welcomed very positive information on successful Open Days in February along with updates on Traineeships and Advanced Technical Awards and Student Achievements.

Members commended the success of the Coleraine and Ballymoney Open Days and acknowledged the impact of successful marketing, promotion and post-primary engagement. It was hoped that this could also be achieved across the other campuses. In relation to the effect of the Reform Programme on teaching, the Principal reported that necessary cuts to sub-optimal courses would result in more effective delivery of the curriculum. A meeting with the Department will take place on 2 May 2024 to further consider the Review.

Ms Small reported that the CDP submitted to the Department before Christmas would be put before the Minister for scrutiny in the current week. She advised on work currently underway by the CDP Task & Finish Group to restructure the 2024/25 report in line with the Minister's priorities and to support a Corporate Plan for FE. The next meeting of the Group would be in

April with the College represented by the Head of Performance and Planning.

120.8 Audit & Risk Committee

Mrs Martin referred to the Draft Report To Those Charged with Governance (RTTCWG), which the Audit & Risk Committee would use for monitoring development on actions for 2024/25. Members were aware of pressures faced by the College during the year and welcomed a proposed unqualified audit opinion without modification. Mrs Martin welcomed the new staff starting in the College but highlighted they needed time to settle during the year.

Consideration was given to the Draft Annual Report which had been updated to reflect all financial adjustments including the NI Audit Office additional fee. Members noted the gravity of one Priority 1 and three Priority 2 findings and were advised on the action plan which would be drawn up to address recommendations, once new finance staff took up position in April. Information would be provided to the Department and to Committee on a timely basis. Mr Small welcomed a clean audit opinion and focus by management to minimise repeat of issues in the coming year.

During a period of discussion Mrs Martin, Mr Higgins and Mr Lavery clarified a number of issues in response to members' questions in relation to: Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA); basis of related party information and figures in the Annual Accounts; and scheduling and reporting procedures for Internal Audit's annual programme of work and for raising concerns.

Action: A copy of the Raising Concerns log from the Audit & Risk Committee meeting on 5 February would be circulated to all members for information.

Dr Graham confirmed assurances received at the last Audit & Risk Committee meeting that all necessary actions had been taken to allow both sets of accounts to be completed, ensure no recurrence of recent difficulties and that any action plan would be run past the Committee for monitoring and transparency purposes.

The draft minutes of meeting on 5 February 2024 were endorsed.

Mrs Martin drew members' attention to the Audit & Risk Committee Annual Report which included details of internal audit work for the past year. The report was endorsed.

120.9 Resources Committee

The draft minutes of meeting on 22 January 2024 were endorsed. Mr Murphy confirmed good progress on issues discussed at the meeting.

120.10 Education Committee

The draft minutes of meeting on 28 February 2024 were endorsed.

Dr Graham drew attention to the link to the NRC NUS-USI Cost of Living report and commended the report to the Governing Body.

The Principal appreciated the degree of student response to the report survey and asked Mr Dornan and Ms Hemphill to encourage feedback on College student surveys.

120.11 Finance Report

Mr Lavery spoke to the report and advised that updated information to show the position at the end of March 2024 would be taken to the April meeting of Resources Committee.

In response to a question from Mr Murphy, Mr Lavery outlined the DfE procedure for notification of either a revised budget or authorised overspend which would apply in relation to any potential pay rise for lecturers for 2023/24. He confirmed that this would require accruing into the 31st March 2024 management accounts and College financial returns to the Department.

120.12 New Build

The update report, Gateway presentation and minutes of the Capital Projects Steering Group meeting on 8 November were noted.

120.13 College Partnership Agreement

Consideration was given to the signed Partnership Agreement, Partnership Manual for DfE and letters provided. The Principal advised that changes to foundation documents would be brought to the Governing Body meeting on 24 April 2024.

Members were content to note the documents.

120.14 Annual Governance Update

Mr Lavery presented the Corporate Risk Register and highlighted key changes, the longer-term red risks and the significant black risk.

Members noted the report, which had been considered by the Audit & Risk Committee on 5 February.

120.15 Any Other Business

None.

120.16 Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on 24 April in Farm Lodge and followed by a short meeting of independent members.

The meeting ended at 6.08pm.

Mr K Nelson



Chair

Date 24 April 2024

Mrs K Wallace



Secretary