
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTEENTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD IN THE BOARDROOM, NORTHLAND BUILDING COMMENCING 17:00

PRESENT

Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair
Mr P Clancy
Mr B Dougherty
Mrs M Gormley
Mrs O McEleney
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mr F Smyth (from 17:16)
Mr P Thompson
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

REMOTE ATTENDANCE

Mrs D Creevy
Dr S Fisher
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services

APOLOGIES

Mrs C Shongo
Mrs S McMahon

116.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting. He formally introduced Mrs McEleney, newly elected Staff Governor to the Board. The Governing Body Chair noted the valuable addition of the staff voice on the Board. A round of self-introductions took place.

Mrs McEleney thanked members.

Mr F Smyth gave prior notice that he would be arriving late to the meeting.

116.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS/DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no conflict of interest declarations. There were no declarations of any other business.

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 1 Summary Register of Interests – June 2025

The Summary Register of Interest Report was noted with a new entry for

Mrs McEleney and amendments to Dr Kennedy and Mr Clancy's entries.
Following his recent permanent appointment as Chair to the Board, Prof M Ó'Néill's title within the Register was amended. Mr B O'Neill, Vice Chair on behalf of everyone congratulated Prof M Ó'Néill on his appointment.

116.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 12 MARCH 2025

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

The Draft Minutes of the Governing Body meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

Following the Board meeting held on 12 March 2025, Governor Dr K Kennedy forwarded details of his recent appointment. The Register was duly updated (Paper 116.2, Report 1).

116.4 GOVERNING BODY CHAIR'S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó'Néill

➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 ICS External Board Effectiveness Review

Report 1.1 Summary Report – External Board Effectiveness Review

Report 1.2 Sector Report – External Board Effectiveness Review

Report 2 Governor Assessments – verbal update

The Governing Body Chair reported to the Board that he has agreed to continue as Chair of the CEF for another year. The Department (DfE) has appointed Mr Gordan Milligan, OBE as an independent convenor to support the work of CEF.

The Governing Body Chair stated that following his appointment as permanent Chair the vacancy now exists for a further co-opted member on the Board. The Governing Body Chair proposed Ms Clare McGee as a potential co-optee. The proposal was seconded by Mrs M Gormley.

The Governing Body Secretary will notify the Department (DfE) of the proposed co-optee.

Mr F Smyth arrived at the meeting at this juncture.

The Governing Body Chair noted that several Governor's terms of office will complete within the next six months. Those members have recently received Departmental (DfE) communication notifying them of their eligibility for consideration for appointment for a second term of office on the Board. The Governing Body Chair acknowledged the Governors' work and commitment to date and encouraged them to consider taking on a second term of office.

Report 1 ICS External Board Effectiveness Review**Report 1.1 Summary Report – External Board Effectiveness Review****Report 1.2 Sector Report – External Board Effectiveness Review**

The Governing Body Chair referred to the External Board Effectiveness Review and noted the strong endorsement of the work of the Governing Body.

Mr B O'Neill will be attending the feedback meeting of the Sector Effectiveness Review with ICS on 19 June 2025.

A Draft Action Plan will be brought to the September 2025 Board meeting for discussion.

Report 2 Governor Assessments – verbal update

The Governor Body Chair shared the potential dates for the Governor Assessments. These will take the same format as last year.

116.5 PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS – Mr L Murphy

The Principal as lead negotiator was pleased to report that the lecturers' pay offer has been settled. This was for a two year offer covering the 2024/25 and 2025/26 academic years. The Business Case has been submitted to the Department (DfE) for approval. The Workload Task and Finish Group are actively progressing its review of workload. The next meeting is scheduled for 24 June 2025.

Early conversations are taking place with the Department (DfE) on further opportunities for efficiencies within the Sector.

The Board were updated in relation to the various PeacePlus Projects together with the recent meetings and events the Principal attended. Upcoming meetings and events were also highlighted.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Murphy and invited Mrs Gormley to present her report to the Board on the business of the recent Audit & Risk Committee meeting.

116.6 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs M Gormley, Vice Committee Chair**➤ PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

Report 1 Committee Vice Chair's Summary Report

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 20 May 2025

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

The Committee Vice Chair updated the Board on the changes to risk scoring and other updates in relation to the Corporate Risk Register. The key points included;

Risk COR0001 – Impact on performance/availability of information relating to third part hosting – this risk was closed off and removed from the Corporate Risk Register in February 2025.

Risk COR0006 – Business Continuity Plan/Disaster Recovery - the review is now complete. There has been no change to the scoring of this risk.

Risk COR0007 – Failure to Maintain Financial Stability - the College received a revised 2025/26 Draft Budget position on 28 April 2025 with an improved allocation. The scoring of this risk will remain as severe. (Further detail provided under agenda item 116.8, Report 6).

Risk COR0010 – Cyber Security – the annual Phishing Simulation exercise was conducted for all staff on 19 February 2025. The results were improved on the previous exercise. The scoring of this risk remains unchanged.

Risk COR0011 – Impact of Industrial Action – there is a commitment to review teacher pay scale parity in 2025/26, to review the industrial relations framework and to progress the work of the Workload Task and Finish Group.

Support staff – the National Employers have made a full and final offer of 3.2% for 2025/26. The scoring under this risk has been increased to high. Likelihood now moves from a score of 2 to 3.

Risk COR0013 – Inefficient and inappropriate use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) – Mr T Moore has been appointed as Principal Lecturer in Digital Learning, Quality & Performance Department. Mr Moore will chair the AI Working Group. The scoring remains unchanged.

The Finance Director reported that since the Audit & Risk Committee meeting an impasse has occurred in relation to payment of Holiday Pay going forward. The Finance Director noted the disappointment with this delay. There is a pending tribunal case in a Sector College relating to the holiday pay matter and the Sector are awaiting the outcome of this case before progressing. This may now require an extension/addendum to the existing Business Case or a new Business Case to be drafted and submitted.

The Vice Committee Chair confirmed that approval was received from the Department of Finance (DoF) and DfE on 6 May 2025 for Insurance Services to the NI, FE Sector. UMAL will provide these insurance services.

Internal Audit Reviews

- Additional Support Funding and Funding Allocation Processes for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities – this audit received a satisfactory assurance opinion with no findings/management actions raised.
- Compliance with DfE Letters of Offer - this audit received a satisfactory assurance opinion with one low priority finding/management action.

A brief discussion took place on a planned workshop from RSM to some Sector staff. It was suggested for Mr T Moore, PL in Digital Learning, Quality & Performance to present the Digital Strategy and deliver an AI training session before the Governing Body meeting in September 2025.

The importance of Sector Training in AI from the Department (DfE) was also highlighted.

In closing the Internal Audit discussion, the Committee Vice Chair reported that the contract with RSM is due to complete in July 2025. SERC are leading on the procurement for the internal audit service going forward for the Sector.

Referring to External Audit matters, the Audit Strategy for 2024/25 was presented to the Committee. The significant increase in the estimated Audit fee for 2024/25 and the year on year increases in fees was highlighted.

The Committee members completed its annual Self-Assessment exercise; an action plan will be drafted and brought to the next Committee meeting.

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on
20 May 2025**

The Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Gormley and invited Mr Clancy to present his report to the Board on the business of the Education Committee meeting.

116.7 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Mr P Clancy, Committee Chair

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS**

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| Report 1 | Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting held on 4 June 2025 |
| Report 2 | Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting |
| Report 3 | Draft College Development Plan 2025/26 |
| Report 4 | Quality Improvement Plan 2024/27 |
| Report 5 | Sustainability & Social Responsibility Report |

The Committee Chair reported that the Committee received a presentation from Mrs Moore, Head of Quality & Performance. Mrs Moore provided the Committee with an update on the Quality & Performance Department structure, an update on the work of the Teaching and Learning Academy and progress on the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2024/2027 (Report 4).

Positive outcomes and good practice were reported on the recent ETI Evaluations on the Step Up Programme, two areas for improvement were noted. The Traineeship Programme outlined three areas for action, including Essential Skills. The outcomes for Essential Skills across the sector and within the collective programme have been raised as a concern, especially in relation to numeracy. While good practice has been identified in some colleges an action plan for improvement for Essential Skills within Traineeships has been requested as well as a plan for the other Traineeship recommendations from each college. Action plans created to address gaps in both areas are in progress.

- **MaSN Bid & Level 6 Proposals:** Bid for 2025/26 includes an increase of 79 students; proposals for Level 6 were submitted on 31 March 2025. The College is awaiting Departmental (DfE) approval.

- **Retention & Attendance:** Retention down slightly to 91.69% (from 92.33% in May 2024). Attendance: 83.3% full-time, 87.3% part-time.
- **College Development Plan 2024/25:** as at March 2025, 95% of full-time targets were met and AppsNI targets were exceeded. There was a 14% increase in full-time, HE learners compared to 2023/24 and 89% of part-time individual target achieved. Retention as of March 2025 was 91.5%. Short courses enrolment targets were met, but there was a shortfall in individual numbers. There will be continued focus in this area for 2025/26.
- **Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 3 June 2025**

The Draft Minutes of the Education Committee meeting were taken as read and agreed were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mr P Clancy
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty
- **Report 3 Draft College Development Plan 2025/26**

Target setting for 2025/26 for both enrolments and individuals for curriculum activity were noted.

It is anticipated that the year end 2024/25 will show c 8000 individuals (slightly below the 2024/25 target but at 5% growth on 2023/24 and over 13300 enrolments (over target and growth on the 2023/24 figures). These figures have formed the baseline for planned growth for 2025/26.

In relation to the provision for 2025/26 there has been an emphasis on sustaining an uplift in year 1 to year 2 retention rates, a planned increase in part-time, short courses provision including aspirational targets for Community and Outreach provision and achievement of targets for the delivery of PeacePlus funded activity.

PeacePlus funding has been secured for a number for significant projects focusing on digital, sustainability and green skills delivery by NWRC supporting the wider economic development in the North West.

The target setting for 2025/26 is for 8400 individuals and 13600 enrolments. This has been profiled into the present reduced budgetary constraints and triangulated with the Directorate Staffing Resource Plan.

PROPOSED, Mr B O'Neill
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

The Education Committee recommended approval to the Board for Mrs O McEleney to serve on the Education Committee.

The Board were happy to support this.

PROPOSED, Mr P Clancy
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

- **Report 4 Quality Improvement Plan 2024/27**
The update on the Whole College Improvement Plan 2024/27 was referred to with attention drawn to the nine key areas for improvement.
- **Report 5 Sustainability & Social Responsibility Report**
Ongoing sustainability initiatives, external funding secured, and new course/events were noted.

The Governing Body extended the invite to Governors to the Departmental (DfE) information session on the proposed 16-18 legislation on 23 June 2025.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Clancy and invited Mrs Creevy to present her report to the Board on the business of the Resources Committee.

116.8 RESOURCES COMMITTEE – Mrs D Creevy, Committee Chair

➤ **PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS - Finance reports**

- Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Resources Committee Meeting
- Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 3 June 2025
- Report 3 Committee's Terms of Reference
- Report 4 Management Accounts for the 9 Months ended 30 April 2025
- Report 5 Management Accounts for the 10 Months ended 31 May 2025
- Report 6 Budget Update 2025/26
- Report 7 Draft OBC Proposed Foodovation and Skills Centre – Causeway Growth Deal
- Report 8 Business Support Centre Update

Staffing Reports

- Report S1 Staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2025/28
- Report S2 Human Resources Business Plan 2024/25

Client Services Reports

- Report C1 Equality Report
- Report C2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Referring to estates' matters, the Committee Chair was pleased to report on progress made on the new Frameworks (Design Team & Contractor). Interim arrangements are now in place to ensure continuity of services post July 2025 until the new service providers are secured.

In relation to the City Deals - Derry City & Strabane, there is a CPD resource issue leading to a delay with CPD working on the PQQ documents relating to the appointment of the Integrated Consultant Team (ICT). The WHSCT who are moving into the Strabane Campus site have expressed a wish to potentially seek early access to a substantial part of the site to commence their new build project. It is expected that completion of the new Campus in the Canal Basin build to be late 2029. This has the potential to cause financial pressures for WHSCT. The Finance Director provided

detail to the Board on the options currently being considered stating he was hopeful that a suitable solution will be found.

The prompt payment figure for the 30 days for April 2025 was 94% and the year to date was 96%.

The Committee Chair noted correspondence from the Director of FE in relation to the charitable status of FE Colleges. The Department for Communities (DfC) are not currently in a position to address the issue as it requires legislative process. The timeframe will now be in the 2027/2032 Assembly mandate. The status quo regarding the position of FE Colleges will remain.

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on
3 June 2025**

The Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee meeting were taken as read and were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 3 Committee's Terms of Reference – no amendments proposed

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 4 Management Accounts for the 9 Months to 30 April 2025

The key movements within the Management Accounts were reported.

- An overspend in teaching staff costs mainly relating to the higher than budgeted pay rise.
- An underspend in non-teaching staff costs which mainly relates to the lower than budgeted pay rise.
- Expenditure was over budget mainly due to investment in computer, equipment and estates.
- There were no major concerns with the end of year July 2025 accounts.
- Aged Debtors at 1 May 2025 figures were significantly reduced on the previous figures.

Report 5 Management Accounts for the 10 Months ended 31 May 2025

The most recent Management Accounts ended 31 May 2025 were issued to the Board. The Finance Director confirmed that there were no significant changes from the Management Accounts to 30 April 2025 and no major movements to note. (Report 4).

Report 6 Budget Update 2025/26

The College has bid for a MaSN of 498 for 2025/26, an increase of 90 from the 2024/25 targets. The funding for the 2025/26 year has been reduced by 3.1% across the sector of which the College reduction is £9k.

- The Step-Up Project is budgeted at £350k for 2025/26, a reduction from £937k in 2024/25. No formal communication to date has been received from the Department (DfE).
- Premises costs were showing an increase of 51.4%. The main reason of this increase is the additional cost associated with the transfer of TUPE staff from the PFI contractor. This will take effect from February 2026.
- The NDPB to 31 March 2026 stated the College is forecasting a pressure position of £617k. The Department (DfE) have indicated that the £907k pressure previously noted be included within the NDPB return. This will increase the forecasted pressure to approximately £1.5m.

The Finance Director added he is broadly comfortable with the budget and is hopeful that further funds may become available in the June monitoring round. The Draft Budget now provides £16.7m to FE Colleges towards pay pressures including Employers' National Insurance. The £6.4m previously allocated to meet Sector non-pay pressures has been removed.

The Board were content to approve the Budget with a forecasted pressure of £617k.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 7 Draft OBC Proposed Foodovation and Skills Centre – Causeway Growth Deal

The previous target for completion of OBCs for projects funded under the Causeway Coast and Glens Growth Deal has been revised from June to September 2025, however it has been agreed that given the progress to date the OBC for the Foodovation and Skills Centre will be submitted to Council for review by the Leisure and Development Committee on 5 August 2025.

The Board were content to approve the Draft OBC.

PROPOSED, Mrs D Creevy

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Report 8 Business Support Centre Update

All targets for the year to March 2025 have been achieved. Some Departmental (DfE) funding has been reduced for 2025/26 however further bids have been placed with the Department (DfE). The College has been successful as a partner in two PeacePlus projects; PRISM, (led by South West College) and NW CAM2 (led by Catalyst).

The Business Support Centre is in discussion with three potential foreign direct investors regarding Assured Skills Academies.

The Principal & CE wished to pay tribute under Mr P McKeown's leadership to Mr F Tuffy, Business Support Centre Manager and the team for their significant work.

Moving to the Staffing matters, the Committee Chair reported that a total of 23 recruitment exercises were completed from 10/02/2025 to 20/05/2025. The majority of posts recruited since September 2024 were support posts (47%). To assist with 'hard to fill' posts the College has applied to DfE under the 'Application to Recruit Full-time FE Lecturers Outside the Requirements of FE Circular 01/12' mechanism

with positive outcomes. The Department (DfE) have also approved for the College to extend the Essential Skills criteria to assist with recruiting.

The sickness levels through 2024/25 have reduced overall. The sickness absence for the whole College at April 2025 was 5.29% compared to April 2024 at 6.05%.

Completion rates for the mandatory training modules (excluding the Cyber Security module) were showing 91% and above as at May 2025. The target rate is 90%.

Cyber security training must be completed annually rather than every three years for the remaining five modules.

From September 2024, 323 Staff Development applications have been received by the HR Team to date.

The Equality, Data Monitoring Review 2024/25 was presented to the Committee. This exercise reviews the College employment practices and responsibilities under Section 75 categories. Despite ongoing affirmative actions year on year there is little movement in relation to a balance of the community background of staff. It was agreed at the Resources Committee meeting that the HR Manager extract the ROI data from the Equality Report for the next Committee meeting.

Report S1 Staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2025/28

Members noted the report.

Report S2 Human Resources Business Plan 2024/25

Members noted the report.

Report C1 Equality Report

Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services was delighted to report that since the issue of the Equality Report the College has been awarded the status as a College of Sanctuary.

Report C2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Members noted the report.

In concluding the Committee Chair informed the Board that she was stepping down as Chair of the Resources Committee. The Governing Body Chair on behalf of the Board thanked Mrs Creevy for her dedicated service as her time as Chair.

An expression of interest will be sent to Board members for the role.

116.9 SCHEDULE OF BOARD MEETINGS 2025/26

Members noted the Schedule.

116.10 CORRESPONDENCE

- Received on 3 April 2025 from Ms K Clarke, UCU – regarding the Trade Dispute. This communication was sent to Governors on 4 April 2025
- Received on 17 April 2025 from Ms L Watson – noted under Agenda item 116.8, Report 1.
- Invitation received on 2 June 2025 from Mr I Snowden, Permanent Secretary to the Partnership Engagement Event on 17 June 2025. Mr P Clancy attended this invite on behalf of the Governing Body Chair.

Mr Clancy reported on the key items from the event to members, this included budget challenges going forward. A comprehensive spending review is planned for 2026 with a Corporate Plan to support this for 2026/30.

116.11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no any other business declared earlier in the meeting.

116.12 RESERVED BUSINESS

Taken separately.

Date of Next Meeting; 24 September 2025

The Governing Body Chair closed this part of the meeting at 17:15 and wished everyone a good summer break.

Signed, 
Prof M Ó'Neill, Governing Body Chair

Date, 24 September 2025