North West Regional College
Governing Body
Meeting – 17 June 2026
Minutes Approved – 21 October 2026

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY SECOND MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD IN THE BOARDROOM, STRAND ROAD CAMPUS COMMENCING 17:00

PRESENT
Mr B O'Neill, Governing Body Vice Chair
Mr B Dougherty
Mrs O McEleney
Mrs S McMahon
Mrs C Shongo
Mr P Thompson

IN ATTENDANCE
Ms V Toland (incoming Academic Staff Governor)
Mr P McKeown, Finance Director (until after Report 122.8, F7)
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Ms L O' Hara (for training item 122.0 only)
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

REMOTE ATTENDANCE
Mr P Clancy (until 18:33)
Mr F Smyth (from 18:01)
Ms S Kelly, Head of HR (from 19:08)
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services (from 18:01)

APOLOGIES
Dr S Fisher
Mrs M Gormley
Ms C McGee
Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive

122.0 TRAINING – WHITE RIBBON
Ms O'Hara delivered White Ribbon, 'Listen, Learn, Lead' Training to members. White Ribbon NI is a registered charity dedicated to ending violence against women and girls. Operating as part of the global movement, they empower men and boys to become allies, challenging the harmful attitudes and behaviours that contribute to violence against women and girls.

122.1 WELCOME
The Governing Body Vice Chair, Mr O'Neill notified members that in the absence of the Governing Body Chair, Prof M Ó'Néill, he would chair the meeting. The meeting was officially opened. Congratulations was extended to Ms V Toland on her re-appointment as Staff Academic representative on the Board. Pending receipt of the Minute of Appointment,

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Ms Toland was joining the meeting as an attendee. Mr P Clancy and Mr P Thompson gave prior notice that they would be required to leave the meeting before its conclusion.

Due to presenter availability, the Governing Body Vice Chair agreed to reorder the Agenda items and take the Education Committee's Reports (122.7) next.

122.7 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Mr P Clancy, Committee Chair

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting
Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 26 May 2026
Report 3 Digital Strategy 2025-28, Review May 2026
Report 4 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26 – working document
Report 4.1 WCQIP 2025/26 Progress Report - May 2026
Report 5 College Development Plan

Client Services

Report CS1 Safeguarding Report

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting

- The Education Committee Chair reported that the Committee had met at the Greystone Campus and had received a tour of the facilities noting the distinctive role of the campus within its local area.
- Members noted the updates on the FE, 'Fit for the Future' programme, including the governance arrangements and delivery structures remained under development, with the initial sector focus on curriculum reform. The Committee recognised the challenge of progressing reform in the absence of confirmed budgets and within the wider financial pressures facing the FE sector.
- Members received assurance on the College Development Plan and key performance indicators, noting strong enrolment performance against target (103%), retention slightly below target (89%) and the Department's decision to maintain the 2026/27 maximum student number (MaSN)allocation at the same level as 2025/26.
- The Committee noted positive outcomes from the ETI insight visit of the ApprenticeshipsNI motor vehicle provision, while recognising areas for continued development, including employer engagement and marketing.
- Members noted continued progress against the Digital Strategy, (Ref Paper 122.7, Report 3), Whole College Quality Improvement Plan, including strengths in governance and performance oversight, staff capability, digital development, industry engagement, widening participation and learning support.
- Areas for continued focus included Essential Skills achievement, consistency in quality assurance and self-evaluation, learner survey engagement and preparation for sector-wide data reform. Overall performance continued to be assessed as green/amber, (Ref Paper 122.7, Reports 4, 4.1).

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- The Safeguarding Report was received with members noting increased demand for student support, anxiety as the most prevalent presenting issue, and the sector's engagement with DfE on strengthening the Safeguarding Policy in relation to the Ending Violence Against Women and Girls agenda, (Ref Paper 122.7, Report CS1).
- Members also noted the continued increase in Learning Link support requirements and the challenge created by the Learning Link budget remaining unchanged since 2012.

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 26 May 2026

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 Thompson
SECONDED, Mr F Smyth

Report 5 College Development Plan 2026/27 – Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards

- Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum and Academic Standards, provided a verbal update on the College Development Plan ahead of the planned submission date of 18 June 2026 to the Department (DfE). The College was preparing to submit the CDP without confirmed budget information and that the approach taken was to identify the potential impact on targets, enrolments and related activity, aligned to the Equality Impact Assessment.
- Members noted that, over the previous three years, the College had achieved approximately 7% growth in reported individuals and enrolments and that the 2026/27 Delivery Plan had been developed by the Director of Curriculum and Academic Standards and Heads of Faculty, aligned to staffing and budget planning.
- The update highlighted that the College's working scenario included a potential curriculum contribution of approximately £950,000 towards a plan which could reach around 50% of the proposed deficit, subject to further budget confirmation.
- The Board noted the key assumptions underpinning the CDP, including protecting existing learners, honouring offers already made particularly in full-time provision, avoiding growth, protecting second-year learners, maintaining entitlement framework provision, protecting SEN provision and seeking to protect provision linked to income streams such as apprenticeships, traineeships and other funded activity.
- The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards provided detail on the potential impact of the challenges for the College/Sector on decisions that may have to be made if the working budget scenario had to be implemented. The Board noted that, if significant reductions were required, the curriculum would require a substantial operational reset at the end of September 2026.
- The Finance Director provided further financial context and emphasised that the College had not received a confirmed budget; rather, the current planning position was based on a requirement to spend no more than 94% of prior year income. Other non-grant income may also be impacted. Members expressed concern at the level of uncertainty created significant risk for curriculum planning, the timing of the budget position and the potential impact on learners, stakeholders, community provision.

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The Governing Body Vice Chair returned to the normal running of the Agenda items.

122.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members were invited to declare any conflicts of interest. No conflicts or additional items of business were declared.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Summary Register of Interests – June 2026

Members noted the updated Report. **Members will be sent their individual records during the summer break for review.**

122.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 11 MARCH 2026

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 approved the adoption of the Minutes.
PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

121.0 – **Draft Strategic Plan** – Governors got the opportunity to forward their comments on the Draft Plan. This item will be taken further into the Agenda for further discussion and approval (Ref 122.4, Report 1).
121.4 Budget 2026/27– was to come back to the Board for approval once formal budget notification had been received and the curriculum planning process for 2026/27 was complete. As reported earlier no final budget has been confirmed, the matter will be discussed further within the Audit and Resources Committees, (Agenda ref 122.6).
121.6 The Audit & Risk Committee Chair sent correspondence to the Department (DfE) in relation to the re-establishment of the ARC Sector forum. A response was received from Ms J Scallon, Director of FE, DfE and the decision currently rests with the Sector Chairs.
121.7 Education Committee – The proposal to bring key learning and outputs from the *Ending Violence Against Women and Girls* conference to a future Governing Body meeting has been scheduled within the Governing Body Programme of Work 2026/27.
121.8 The Board agreed it would be beneficial to provide governors with a briefing on how accounts were prepared, key technical issues and diversified income and project risks, to strengthen Board confidence and oversight and a workshop will be delivered during September/October 2026.

APPROVED

122.4 GOVERNING BODY VICE CHAIR'S BUSINESS – Mr B O'Neill

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS
Report 1 Draft Strategic Plan 2026-31
Report 2 Governor Membership – verbal report
Report 3 Governor Assessments 2025/26 – verbal report

Report 1 Draft Strategic Plan 2026-31
The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards provided an overview of the Draft Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan sets out a clear direction for the College for the period 2026-31 setting out the six key strategic themes that respond to the needs of learners, employers, staff and communities. Delivery will depend on focus, collaboration and accountability. Progress will be monitored and the College will respond to changing regional, economic and educational needs.
By 2031 it is intended that the College will be further recognised not only for the quality of provision, but for the difference it makes, widening opportunity, strengthening skills, supporting enterprise, promoting inclusion and helping to build a more sustainable and prosperous North West.

Members approved the Draft Strategic Plan for consultation, with the opportunity for Governors to submit any comments for consideration in the coming week. The final version to be brought back to the Board following stakeholder consultation.
PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo
SECONDED, Mrs S McMahon

Report 2 Governor Membership – verbal report
Members considered and approved committee membership, (Education and Resources Committees) for Mr B O'Neill and Mr F Smyth following their agreement to serve a further four-year term, subject to receipt of the Minute of Appointment.
PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Following the Academic Staff Governor election that took place on 2 June 2026, members also considered and approved committee membership, (Audit & Risk and Education Committees) for Ms V Toland, pending receipt of the Minute of Appointment.
PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo
SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Report 3 Governor Self Assessments 2025/26 – verbal report
The Governing Body Secretary on behalf of the Governing Body Chair informed Governors that the annual Self Assessments will take place over the summer period.

APPROVED

122.5 PRINCIPAL & CHIEF EXECUTIVE'S BUSINESS

In the absence of the Principal the Governing Body Vice Chair provided members with a summary of the College highlights for the academic year 2025/26 including the recent meetings, engagements and end of year award ceremonies held during June 2026.

The Governing Body Vice Chair invited Mrs Shongo, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee to present the Report of the recent Committee meeting.

122.6 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs C Shongo, Committee Chair

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report
Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 19 May 2026
Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 19 May 2026

The Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee meeting were taken as read and were an accurate record of the meeting. Members agreed to adopt the Minutes.
PROPOSED, Mr B Dougherty
SECONDED, Mrs S McMahon

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report

The Committee had met virtually on 19 May 2026 and had received assurance that the Corporate Risk Register had been reviewed, with no changes to the scores of the ten corporate risks since the previous meeting. Members noted key risks relating to curriculum quality and improvement, business continuity, financial stability, cyber security, sustainability and the ESG agenda. The Committee paid particular attention to the severe risk relating to financial stability arising from the significant reduction on funding from the previous year.
The Director of Finance had updated the Committee on the risk associated with the HR/Payroll system contract extension and the need for continued engagement with CPD and relevant parties to secure system continuity beyond November 2027. Since the Committee meeting the Director of Finance alerted the Board that the College had been notified that the contract extension will not continue beyond November 2027. The College continues to work on this matter.

The Committee received the Annual Report on the Provision of Internal Audit Services for 2025/26 and noted that no major internal control weaknesses had been identified and that the overall internal audit opinion was that the College has adequate and effective arrangements for risk management, control and governance. The Committee also noted the positive findings from three internal audit reviews with no recommendations on Data Protection, the Climate Change Act 2022 and the DfE Assurances on College Performance Data.

APPROVED

The Committee also considered the External Audit Strategy 2025–2026. Concern was expressed regarding the proposed increase in the external audit fee from £46,000 to £50,500, and it was agreed that further explanation should be sought from the external auditor.

122.7 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – taken earlier in the meeting.

The Governing Body Chair invited the Mr Smyth, Chair of the Resources Committee to present the Report of the recent Committee meeting.

122.8 RESOURCES COMMITTEE – Mr F Smyth, Committee Chair

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS - Finance papers

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Resources Committee Meeting
Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 4 June 2026

Finance Reports

Report F1 Estates Strategy 2021-31 – Update
Report F2 Business Support Centre Update
Report F3 Management Accounts for 1 Month to 30 April 2026
Report F4 Draft Financial Statements & Accounts for 8 Months to 31 March 2026
Report F5 Budget 2026/27
Report F6 Investment Policy
Report F7 Committee's Terms of Reference

Client Services Reports

Report CS1 Equality Report
Report CS2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Staffing Reports

Report S1 Staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2024-27 - Action Plan Update
Report S2 Human Resources Business Plan Update 2025/26

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 4 June 2026

There were no members attending the Board meeting that were able to second the Draft Minutes. The Governing Body Secretary will contact Dr S Fisher post meeting to seek her approval to second the Minutes.
PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth
SECONDED, Dr S Fisher (approval received on 04/09/26)

Report F5 Budget 2026/27

The Finance Director reported on the 2026/27 budget position, including a potential deficit of £4.4m, the key budget assumptions, expenditure controls and the difficulty of preparing a balanced budget in the absence of confirmed Departmental (DfE) allocations.

APPROVED

Members expressed concern regarding the continuing absence of confirmed allocations and noted the potential impact on curriculum planning, staffing, learners and wider provision. The Finance Director reported the College will be able to make some savings however it will not be possible to balance the Budget if a 6% cut is imposed.

Report F6 Investment Policy

Members were content to approve the Investment Policy noting the two amendments.
PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth
SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Report F7 Committee's Terms of Reference

Members approved the Committee's Terms of Reference, subject to an amendment to item no 48 to confirm that the Terms of Reference would be reviewed annually, in line with the recommendation from the External Board Effectiveness Review.
PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth
SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Members discussed the White Ribbon/Ending Violence Against Women and Girls agenda following the presentation/training provided (Agenda ref 122.0). Mr Smyth noted the value of governor-level leadership in this area. The Head of Client Services advised that the College was leading significant work across the sector and that visible support from the Governing Body would be valuable.

Agreed Action: Expressions of interest will be sought for both male and female Governor Champions. Ms G Moss agreed to draft the expression of interest and forward it to the Governing Body Secretary for issue to members.

The Finance Director left the meeting at this juncture.

Client Services Reports

Report CS1 Equality Report
Report CS2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Members noted the updates provided in relation to the Equality Report and Data Protection/Compliance Update. The Committee Chair advised that these remained complex and increasing areas of work, but that the College was managing them effectively. Members recognised the continued pressures being experienced across both academic and support staff teams, including within Client Services, and acknowledged the positive work being undertaken despite ongoing challenges and uncertainty.
It was noted that the College should continue to provide visible leadership, direction and positivity, while recognising the significant contribution being made by staff across the organisation.

APPROVED

Staffing Reports

Report S1 Staff Health & Wellbeing Strategy 2024-27 - Action Plan Update

Report S2 Human Resources Business Plan Update 2025/26

Members discussed HR, workforce and sickness absence matters. The Head of HR advised that the three-year trend analysis showed increasing sickness absence, with long-term absence having the greatest impact on overall figures. Members noted that the trend affected both academic and support staff.

122.9 CORRESPONDENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Correspondence from Matthew Patrick MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for NI

Members noted correspondence received from Matthew Patrick MP following his visit to the Limavady, Main Street Campus for the hosting of the Growth Deal. Members noted the positive correspondence and the value of the visit in showcasing the College's work and facilities.

Report 2 Letter from L Watson DfE to Chairs & Principals

Members noted correspondence from Louise Watson, DfE, to FE Chairs and Principals regarding the FE 'Fit for the Future' programme and its planned direction of travel. It was acknowledged that the programme would require significant resource, time and effort from colleges, particularly considering changing demographics and the level of work needed to support future sector planning.

122.10 SCHEDULE OF BOARD MEETINGS 2026/27

Members noted the Schedule.

122.11 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business to cover.

REPORT 1 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members reflected on the effectiveness of the meeting and noted that the meeting was well organised and well prepared. Members also noted that while the papers were detailed and thorough, there may be scope to review the volume of papers presented to the Governing Body, particularly where summary reports are already provided alongside full committee papers.

Agreed Action - members agreed that a more considered discussion would be useful regarding the volume and purpose of papers presented to the Governing Body. It was suggested that this could be explored further, potentially as part of a future Strategy Day.

The Governing Body Vice Chair concluded the open session of the meeting at 19:42 after which Reserved Business was addressed.

APPROVED

122.12 RESERVED BUSINESS

Taken separately.

Date of next meeting – 21 October 2026

Signed _____
Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair

Date: 21 October 2026

APPROVED