

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

PRESENT

Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair
Mr P Clancy
Mr B Dougherty
Dr S Fisher
Mr M McCafferty (from 17:08)
Mrs O McEleney
Mrs S McMahon
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mrs C Shongo
Mr P Thompson
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director (until 18:42)
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Mr S Lindsay, Strategy Workshop Facilitator (for item 121.0 only)
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

REMOTE ATTENDANCE

Mrs M Gormley (from 17:24)
Mr B O'Neill
Mr F Smyth
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services

APOLOGIES

Ms C McGee
Ms S Kelly, Head of HR

121.0 PRESENTATION

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Draft Strategic Plan

Report 1.1 Copy of email sent to the Subject Matter Experts

The Governing Body Chair welcomed Mr Lindsay who provided an update on the development of the College Strategic Plan. The presenter summarised the structured approach used during the workshop held in January 2026 and confirmed that work had been progressed across the six themes.

Members were advised that subject matter experts had collated the feedback from group discussions and that the plenary outputs had also been incorporated into updated thematic templates. There will be two complementary outputs: (i) a detailed internal set of templates

to support College development planning and operational delivery and (ii) a shorter, 'reader-friendly' public-facing document focused on the College's strategic commitment for each theme and what success would look like.

Members further emphasised the need to ensure appropriate engagement with staff and students as part of implementation.

It was noted that the document presented was a work in progress and that the final version would also incorporate additional corporate elements (including mission, vision and values, key facts about the College and an overall conclusion section). Members noted the intended timetable and that the final draft would return in June 2026 for Board approval.

Members suggested the following;

- Including an appropriate symbol for each strategic priority.
- Consideration should be given to re-ordering the themes so that areas like student experience and people and culture are more prominent.
- **Action: The Principal to request and circulate a timeline of next steps for the Strategic Plan to Governing Body members.**
- **Action: Governors to forward any comments on the content of the draft thematic summary to the Governing Body Secretary for collation and consideration within the finalised Strategic Plan document.**

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Lindsay for attending and presenting.

Mr Lindsay left the meeting at this juncture.

121.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Chair officially opened the meeting and welcomed everyone.

121.2 CONFLICT OF INTEREST DECLARATIONS AND DECLARATIONS OF ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

121.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 23 JANUARY 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

120.2 Members noted an update on matters arising from the January 2026 meeting. Ref correspondence from the Department for the Economy DfE, (Agenda item 121.9, Report 2). This referred to governor vacancies and competitions and noted that preparatory work was underway for forthcoming competitions. Members noted that the Public Appointments Unit did not currently have capacity to run multiple college competitions concurrently and that priority was being given to other sector requirements at this time. The Governing Body noted that the matter had been formally raised from a good governance perspective and would continue to be monitored.

120.6 Invitations were issued to governors to attend the civic reception in the Causeway Coast & Glens Council in recognition of the Queen's Award.

121.4 GOVERNING BODY CHAIR'S BUSINESS – Prof M Ó'Neill

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

- Report 1 Draft Strategic Plan**
- Report 1.1 Copy of email sent to the Subject Matter Experts**
- Report 2 Budget 2026/27 - Update Meeting with the Permanent Secretary**
- Report 3 Review of Standing Orders**
- Report 3.1 Summary of the Proposed Changes to the Standing Orders**
- Report 4 Correspondence from FE Corporate Governance & Accountability, DfE re Change of Accounting Date**
- Report 4.1 Amended Articles of Government**

The Governing Body Chair provided an update on recent engagements and developments. This included the College's Accountability meeting with the Department (DfE). Members noted that this meeting was positive and reflected a strong endorsement of the College's performance and strategic position. Key points highlighted growth in student numbers, progress across strategic programmes, positive recognition of the College's regional engagement and particular mention on the College's SEN provision.

The Principal reported a key developmental theme emerging from the Departmental (DfE) discussion related to demographic trends and the longer-term requirement to grow adult learner engagement.

The Governing Body Chair provided an update on the continued work of the CEF with regards to pay issues and reform/transformation activity, noting that discussions continued among principals and chairs, with a ministerial engagement expected later in March 2026.

The Governing Body Chair highlighted recent profile-raising activity including UNESCO Northwest Learning City relaunch.

Report 2 Budget 2026/27 - Update Meeting with the Permanent Secretary

Members received an update on the emerging budget context for 2026/27, informed by recent engagement with the Permanent Secretary and Governors. The discussion reflected that the Department (DfE) continued to face significant budget constraints, with sector-wide pressures indicated.

The Finance Director reported that the Draft Budget 2026/27 was brought through the Resources Committee. Members noted that early modelling indicated a challenging position.

Action: An updated budget will be brought back to the Resources Committee/Board for approval once formal budget notification is received and the curriculum planning process for 2026/27 is complete.

Report 3 Review of Standing Orders

Report 3.1 Summary of the Proposed Changes to the Standing Orders

The Governing Body Secretary brought members through the proposed amendments to the Standing Orders. Members noted that the proposed changes included (i) an amendment to reflect use of Microsoft Copilot transcription tool to support minute taking; and (ii) an amendment to move the Standing Orders review to an annual cycle, aligned to governance best practice and external review recommendations.

Members confirmed their agreement to the proposed amendments.

PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo

SECONDED, Mr P Clancy

Report 4 Correspondence from FE Corporate Governance & Accountability, DfE re Change of Accounting Date

Report 4.1 Amended Articles of Government

Members noted correspondence regarding the change of the College's accounting date and the consequential requirement to amend the Articles of Government. The amendment reflected that the financial year would be the 12-month period ending 31 March.

The Finance Director reported on the impacts on this transition year and on the timelines in relation to the preparation of the Annual Report and Financial Statements for year end 31 March 2026.

The Governing Body Chair indicated that the amended Articles would be digitally signed and forwarded to the Department (DfE) following Governing Body approval.

PROPOSED, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

The Governing Body Chair invited Mr Murphy to present his report.

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

The Principal provided a comprehensive update on key areas of College activity and external engagements. Members noted the significant national profile associated with the Queen's Award and the opportunities generated for stakeholder engagement and partnership development.

Members received updates on City Deal/Growth Deal progress, including progress on business cases and related governance requirements. The Financial Deal signing for the Growth Deal will take place in Limavady, Main Street Campus in late April 2026.

The Principal updated members on sector-wide industrial relations, including collective bargaining, workload discussions and related policy reviews.

The Governing Body Chair thanked the Principal for his report and invited the Mrs Shongo, Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee to present the Report of the recent Committee meeting.

121.6 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 17 February 2026 |
| Report 3 | Report to the Audit & Risk Committee |
| Report 4 | Risk Appetite Statement |
| Report 5 | Conflict of Interest Policy |
| Report 6 | Fraud and Anti-Fraud Policy |

The Governing Body received a detailed report on the Audit & Risk Committee meeting held on 17 February 2026. The Committee Chair reported that the Committee reviewed the Risk Register and noted that the enrolment risk had reduced, while the financial stability risk had increased due to DfE flat budget assumptions and wider sector pressures. The Committee also considered the implications of the financial year end change to 31 March and noted that updated audit and budget timelines were being managed.

The Committee received management assurance that a break-even position was projected at 31 March 2026 and noted completion of the PFI handover and asset transfer without issue. The Committee was advised that the TAMS system remained stable.

The Committee received positive internal audit feedback, including a good assurance rating for the Risk Management audit with three minor recommendations. The review report on Data Protection has not been issued however verbal feedback is positive which was recognised as a strong outcome.

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 17 February 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, Mrs S McMahon

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 4 Risk Appetite Statement

The Committee reviewed and endorsed the updated Risk Appetite Statement. Members noted the College's overall cautious risk position with varying tolerance levels across key categories.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 5 Conflict of Interest Policy

The Board approved the Conflict of Interest Policy.

PROPOSED, Mrs S McMahon

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Report 6 Fraud and Anti-Fraud Policy

The Board approved the Fraud & Anti-Fraud Policy.

PROPOSED, Mrs S McMahon

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

Action: Members discussed the potential benefit of a sectoral forum for audit chairs to share expertise and noted that the Committee Chair would re-engage with the Department (DfE) on the re-establishment of a forum to support sector learning and shared assurance.

121.7 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
16 February 2026**

Report 3 Education Committee Terms of Reference - Review

**Report 4 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26 - Progress to Date
04/03/26**

Report 5 Community Education & Outreach Strategic Plan 2026-29

Client Services

Report CS1 Safeguarding Report

Report CS1.1 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy & Procedures

Report CS2 Complaints & Compliments Sector Policy - February 2026

The Governing Body received a detailed report from the Committee Chair on the business of the Education Committee meeting held on 16 February 2026.

- Members noted that the College Development Plan approval for 2025/26 remained outstanding with the Department (DfE). A high-level performance overview had been presented to the Department in November 2025.
- Performance updates included that, as at 9 February 2026, 90% of the overall enrolment target and 88% of individual targets had been achieved. Retention stood at 92% as at 10 February 2026. Members noted that the 2024/25 College success

rate was 76% against a sector average of 79%, reflecting a decline in success and retention and a modest increase in achievement.

- Retention was identified as a key quality improvement priority. Discussion highlighted the impact of learner demographics, including a high proportion of learners from Quintiles 1 and 2 facing multiple challenges and the continuing focus required to support Essential Skills and GCSE retention.
- Members noted growth secured across full-time, part-time and project-based provision and that curriculum planning for 2026/27 had commenced. Curriculum developments included the commencement of Level 6, Early Childhood Studies (part-time) and submission to DfE for Level 6, Creative Industries (Modern Music Professional Practice).
- The Committee discussed the potential risk associated with Pearson's withdrawal of Level 3, BTEC qualifications and related strategic implications. Members challenged whether this should be treated as an emerging risk given the potential impact on Level 3 provision. Management agreed.
- Members considered safeguarding and client services updates, including referrals trends and preventative initiatives. A detailed explanation was provided by the Head of Client Services regarding the Young Carers Project, including its role in supporting learners to remain in education through practical adjustments and wellbeing supports.

In response to a question from Governor, Mr P Thompson, Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards confirmed that the issues on SEN were brought to the Accountability meeting and there is a willingness from the Department (DfE) to address these matters.

The Committee Chair attended the NWRC conference on 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' and discussed the potential value of bringing key learning from the event to the Governing Body.

Action: Consider bringing key learning/outputs from the 'Ending Violence Against Women and Girls' Conference to a future Governing Body meeting (for awareness and assurance).

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on
16 February 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 B Dougherty

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

Report 3 Education Committee Terms of Reference – Review

Proposed amendment – to review the Terms of Reference on an Annual cycle, aligned to governance best practice and external review recommendations.

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

**Report 4 Whole College Quality Improvement Plan 2025/26 - Progress to Date
04/03/26**

The Director of Curriculum and Academic Standards noted that the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan was submitted to the Department (DfE) on 23 February 2026. The key themes were reviewed following the recent Governing Body Strategy Day discussions and aligned with ETI/QAA frameworks. Members received assurance that actions were being monitored (reference Appendix A). The area of curriculum reform is progressing well. The College continues to address actions from its Traineeship Action Plan as well as the Sector Improvement Plan. The Essential Skills/GCSE Actions Plan has been strengthened following ETI feedback.

Report 5 Community Education & Outreach Strategic Plan 2026-29

Members considered the Community Education & Outreach Strategic Plan 2026–29. The Committee received a presentation and noted progress against community enrolment targets and the strategic pillars supported by an 18-month Action Plan.

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Report CS1.1 Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy & Procedures

The Safeguarding, Care & Welfare Policy has been updated to reflect online safeguarding elements and was recommended for approval.

PROPOSED, Mr B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mrs S McMahon

Report CS2 Complaints & Compliments Sector Policy - February 2026

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Clancy for his report and invited the Mr Smyth, Chair of the Resources Committee to present the Report of the recent Committee meeting.

121.8 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
3 March 2026**

Finance Reports

Report F1 Business Support Centre - info graphic

Report F2 Management Accounts for 6 Months to 31 January 2026

Client Services Reports

Report CS1 Equality Report

Report CS2 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Report CS3 FE College Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule

Staffing Reports

Report S1 **Staff Development Programme Semester 2, 2025/26**

Report S2 **Health & Wellbeing Brochure Semester 2, 2025/26**

Report S3 **Equal Opportunities Policy**

The Governing Body received an update from the Chair of the Resources Committee on the meeting held on 3 March 2026. Members noted that the Committee had scrutinised procurement and contract management arrangements and were assured regarding governance controls and compliance.

The Committee discussed the budget process and financial reporting. Members noted the increasing technical complexity of reporting (including impacts of differing year ends and grant accounting treatments).

The Committee discussed the risks associated with diversification of income, including project-based funding. Members noted that each funding stream carries specific compliance requirements and potential clawback risks and emphasised the importance of maintaining robust project accounting and control frameworks. It was noted that the College has recently appointed a Project Officer.

Action: Following agreement at Committee, the Board agreed it would be beneficial to provide governors with a briefing on how accounts are prepared, key technical issues, and diversified income/project risks to strengthen board confidence and oversight.

The Committee noted staffing and wellbeing matters, including recruitment and sickness trends. Discussion highlighted the importance of early support for line managers to manage attendance and wellbeing issues, recognising the challenges within an ageing workforce and the complexity of reasonable adjustment requirements.

The Finance Director left the meeting at this juncture.

Report 2 **Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on
3 March 2026**

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, Mr P Thompson

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report CS3 **FE College Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule**

Members noted that the FE College Sector Retention and Disposal Schedule were presented for approval and was described as formalising existing practice in line with statutory requirements.

PROPOSED, Mr P Thompson

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report S3 Equal Opportunities Policy

PROPOSED, Mr P Thompson

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

121.9 CORRESPONDENCE

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Correspondence from Ms L Watson, DfE - Structural and Staffing Changes within DfE Skills & Education Group

Members noted correspondence from DfE regarding structural and staffing changes within the Skills & Education Group and were advised that movement at senior levels had implications for the pace of reform activity.

Report 2 Correspondence from DfE - update on recruitment competitions for GB members & training

Members noted correspondence regarding recruitment competitions for Governing Body members and training. The matter was linked back to the earlier agenda item 120.2.

Report 3 Correspondence from Vice Chancellor, OU to Principal

The Governing Body noted correspondence from the Vice Chancellor of the Open University congratulating the College and Principal on the award of the Queen Elizabeth Prize for Education. Members further noted that a number of stakeholders had extended congratulations in relation to recent achievements.

121.10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

The Governing Body Chair & Principal formally acknowledged the contribution of Ms Toland, Academic Staff Governor as she approaches the completion of her term of office, recognising the value of the staff voice, professional challenge and communication back into the College community.

Ms Toland thanked the Governing Body and recorded her appreciation for the opportunity to serve on the Board.

An election process will be planned for the Academic Staff Governor post.

REPORT 1 REFLECTION ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

Members reported no concerns with the meeting.

The Governing Body Chair concluded the open session of the meeting at 18:51 after which Reserved Business was addressed.

121.11 RESERVED BUSINESS

Taken separately.

Date of next meeting – 17 June 2026

Signed M Ó Néill
Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair

Date 17 June 2026

APPROVED