

MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND EIGHTEENTH MEETING OF THE GOVERNING BODY OF THE NORTH WEST REGIONAL COLLEGE HELD VIA MICROSOFT TEAMS COMMENCING 17:00

PRESENT

Prof M Ó'Néill, Governing Body Chair
Mr P Clancy
Mrs D Creevy
Mr B Dougherty
Dr S Fisher
Mrs O McEleney
Ms C McGee
Mrs M Gormley
Mrs S McMahon
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Mrs C Shongo
Mr F Smyth
Mr P Thompson
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services
Mr D Heaney, Dept of Education (for presentation item 118.0 only)
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

APOLOGIES

Ms S Kelly, Head of HR

118.0 PRESENTATION

The Governing Body Chair welcomed Mr Dale Heaney, Department of Education (DE) who delivered a comprehensive overview of the proposed legislation requiring all young people in Northern Ireland to remain in education, apprenticeship or training until the age of 18. Mr Heaney outlined the timeline for the Bill, which is expected to be introduced to the NI Assembly in early 2026, with enactment anticipated by March 2027.

A robust discussion followed, during which Board members highlighted several key points:

- The legislation presents a significant opportunity for the Further Education (FE) sector to expand its mandate and impact.

- Members expressed concerns regarding the need for clear boundaries between schools and colleges, and the importance of promoting the College's role in delivering professional and technical education.
- The Board noted a decrease in uptake of the Entitlement Framework within some Area Learning Communities (ALC), emphasizing the need for targeted marketing and independent careers advice for students.
- The importance of partnership between schools and colleges was stressed, alongside the necessity for adequate funding to support the anticipated increase in student numbers.
- Detailed analysis of data required to better understand the potential impact on the FE sector.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Heaney for his informative presentation and reiterated the Board's commitment to maximizing student potential through effective implementation of the new legislation.

Mr Heaney left the meeting at this juncture.

118.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Chair welcomed all attendees to the meeting.

118.2 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 were declared.

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Summary Register of Interests – November 2025

A new entry for Mr Brian Dougherty was noted, reflecting his recent appointment to the Office of Identity & Cultural Expression. The Board extended congratulations to Mr Dougherty.

118.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 24 SEPTEMBER 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 approved the adoption of the Minutes.

PROPOSED, Ms C McGee

SECONDED, Mr B Doherty

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

- A formal note of thanks was sent to Dr K Kennedy on 21 October 2025, recognising his contributions. (Ref 117.4, Report 3).

- An expression of interest was circulated to members serving on one committee, inviting them to consider serving on another. This will be addressed under the Education Committee agenda. (Ref: 118.6)
- The Board approved minor amendments to the College Development Plan (CDP) 2025/26 following feedback from the Department for the Economy (DfE). The amendments were circulated to Governors and subsequently approved. (Ref: 117.7)

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO MEMBERS

Report 1 Governing Body Self Assessments 2024/25

Report 2 Self-Assessment 2024/25 – Summary Position Comments & Attendance Data

The Governing Body Chair thanked Governors for completing the annual Self-Assessment, which achieved a 100% response rate—an improvement over the previous year and above the sector average of 87.4%. All five themes received unanimous agreement or strong agreement from respondents.

Attendance was identified as an area for improvement:

- Governing Body meeting attendance for 2024/25 was 84.8%, slightly down from 85.6% in 2023/24 and below the sector average of 89.7%
- Committee attendance for 2024/25 was 76.8%, down from 80.4% in 2023/24, and the lowest across the sector.

Report 3 ICS Sector Report External Board Effectiveness Review 2025

The Governing Body Chair noted that FE Governing Bodies are operating effectively, demonstrating sound governance and strategic oversight. No significant weaknesses were identified, and a culture of continuous improvement was noted.

Report 4 Strategy Day – verbal update

The Strategy Day is scheduled for 23 January 2026 at the Strand Road Campus with arrangements underway for a facilitator. Ms L Watson (Director of FE) and Ms M Doherty (Deputy Secretary, Skills and Education Group) will be invited to the Governing Body meeting which will follow the Strategy session.

Mr B O'Neill suggested that the facilitator engage with stakeholders to inform the session. A further strategy session is planned for late February/March 2026.

Report 5 Other Business – verbal update

- The Governing Body Chair announced that Mrs D Creevy will complete her term of office in January 2026 and expressed appreciation for her service as Governor and Chair of the Resources Committee.

- The Board noted with sadness the passing of Prof Fabian Monds, former Governor and Vice Chair of the Board and acknowledged his significant contributions to the College and the wider community.
- Governors were reminded of the Christmas lunch at the Clipper Restaurant on 17 December 2025 and were asked to confirm attendance.

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

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

The Principal reported on some of the key events/meetings he recently attended.

- The College successfully hosted the Network of Networks event, which included a Mayor's Reception and welcomed approximately 75 European delegates, as well as representatives from Further Education Northern Ireland (FE NI). Mr P Clancy, Governor, attended some of the sessions.
- The College hosted the TechTides Youth Event on 18 November 2025 at the Strand Road Campus. The event was designed to showcase technological and entrepreneurial opportunities available to young people.
- The Principal has assumed the role of Senior Responsible Owner (SRO) for two new STS Projects, providing strategic oversight and leadership.
- The Principal reported on early-stage discussions with the CEO of City of Derry Airport regarding the development of aircraft maintenance apprenticeship opportunities.
- The Principal represented the College at the following events:
 - Chamber President's Dinner (3 October 2025)
 - Letterkenny Chamber Business Awards (7 November 2025)
 - Networking Lunch with the Canadian Advanced Manufacturing Cluster (NGEN) Delegation (21 October 2025)
 - Ongoing participation in the Magee Taskforce

The Governing Body Chair expressed appreciation to Mr Murphy and invited Mr Clancy's to present the report to the Board on the business of the recent Education Committee meeting.

118.6 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 12 November 2025
Report 3	College Curriculum Plan 2025/26
Report 3.1	Curriculum Strategy – October 2025
Report 4	Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2024/25
Report 5	Quality Improvement Plan 2024/25

Sustainability Governance

- Report 6 Draft Sustainability Strategy
Report 7 Summary of Sustainability Actions with Responsibilities
Report 8 Carbon Emissions Reporting Summary
Report 9 Carbon Footprint Certificate April 2024 - March 2025

Client Services

- Report CS1 Safeguarding Report
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Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 12 November 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 B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

The Board approved the appointment of Mrs S McMahon to serve on the Education Committee.

PROPOSED, Mr B Dougherty

SECONDED, Mrs M Gormley

The Board approved the appointment of Mr M McCafferty, newly appointed Student Governor to serve on the Education Committee, pending Departmental (DfE) approval.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

The Committee Chair provided the Board with an overview of the key items from the Committee meeting.

Summary College Development Plan (CDP) and Enrolment: - The final draft of the CDP 2025/26 was resubmitted to the Department (DfE) on 30 September 2025; final approval is pending.

As of 4 November 2025, the College retention rate was 97%. Enrolment figures as at 5 November 2025: 74% of part-time, 95% of full-time, and 55% of Essential Skills targets achieved. The College continues to focus on increasing part-time enrolments and aligning with a developing Community Strategy for short courses.

For 2024/25, retention decreased by 2.8%, achievement increased by 1.2%, and overall success decreased by 1.4% compared to the previous year. ETI data showed a slight increase in retention (0.3%) and a 3.1% increase in achievement. Traineeship data over three years is classified as 'good'. Courses with retention or achievement below 60% are subject to a detailed review.

Report 3 College Curriculum Plan 2025/26

Report 3.1 Curriculum Strategy – October 2025

The sector is developing a three-year plan, underpinned by the current strategy, which is influenced by government policy and the strategic direction of the Department (DfE).

Report 4 Annual Complaints & Compliments Report 2024/25

Both complaints and compliments have declined compared to the previous year. Most compliments were received from students, parents, and external organizations, highlighting staff dedication and teaching quality.

Most complaints were resolved informally; five cases escalated to formal processes. There is an increasing trend in complaints from parents of students with special educational needs. The College maintains strong links with the Equality Commission and continues to monitor and address trends.

Report 5 Quality Improvement Plan 2024/25

The Whole College QIP for 2024/25 has now been closed out. The College awaits the Commissioning Letter for the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan for 2025/26 from the Department (DfE).

ETI Presentation – Evaluation of FE Colleges

ETI are conducting a sector-wide evaluation of Special Educational Needs (SEN) provision. SEN has been identified as a key government priority. The Committee Chair attended the feedback session with initial feedback indicating best practice at the College. The College and sector summary reports will be shared with the Committee in due course.

Essential Skills and Literacy & Numeracy Strategy

A workshop for Essential Skills staff is planned, focusing on improving outcomes in literacy and numeracy. The College is finalizing its Essential Skills Action Plan and the Action Plan for Traineeships. The Literacy & Numeracy Strategy has been comprehensively reviewed.

Projects

The College secured €305,000 in funding for the Education, Skills & Training: Empowering Economic Mobility (ESTEEM) Project.

Correspondence from DfE – Level 6

Approval was received for the College to proceed with part-time delivery of the Level 6 BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies, commencing January 2026. Collaboration continues with stakeholders to streamline the approval process for Level 6 provision.

Prison Programme Contract Extension

The Prison Programme Contract has been extended to March 2027, with ongoing work to improve the SLA and prepare for future contract bids. The Committee Chair acknowledged and congratulated staff on achieving Grade 4, the highest possible award, following the recent inspection at HMP Magilligan.

Skills Competition & Student Success

The Department (DfE) has invited colleges to bid for funds to support skills activities. The Committee noted the achievements of students, including Jonathan Thompson, a music student, who was invited to perform with Sir James Galway.

Sustainability Governance

Report 6	Draft Sustainability Strategy
Report 7	Summary of Sustainability Actions with Responsibilities
Report 8	Carbon Emissions Reporting Summary
Report 9	Carbon Footprint Certificate April 2024 - March 2025

The Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards highlighted some of the key areas of work taking place.

- Nine United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were identified as priorities for the College.
- The first Mitigation Report under the Climate Change (Reporting Bodies) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2024 was submitted on 27 October 2025.
- The need for investment to progress the sustainability agenda was highlighted.
- **Ms F Moran (PL Sustainability & Social Responsibility) and Mr G Bradley (Estates Manager) will be invited to present Sustainability Reports to the Board** periodically.
- **A request will be sent to Governors to consider the role of Governor Sustainability Champion, who will serve on the College Sustainability Committee.** The College Sustainability Committee will provide direct oversight and report to the Leadership Management Team (LMT), which in turn will report to the Board of Governors.

Client Services

Report CS1 Safeguarding Report

- There has been an increase in safeguarding cases, particularly related to anxiety and mental health.
- The College received reaccreditation of the Carers Quality Standard 2025 and is supporting eight new carers.
- There has been an increase in students referred to and attending the College Counselling Service.
- The College is supporting the White Ribbon initiative and addressing violence against women, including staff training and plans for a related conference.
- SEN provision has expanded, with more students in full-time discrete curriculum areas and mainstream students accessing support. Challenges include static funding despite rising expectations and needs. Recent achievements include Autism NI Award reaccreditation and the purchase of sensory spaces for high-needs areas.
- A new framework for tracking social value has been introduced, with a Social Value Steering Group to be established and tracking implemented through the Social Value Engine License. The Committee Chair commended Ms Moss and Mr B O'Neill for their contributions to the report.

118.7 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 1.1	Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 4 November 2025
Report 2	Management Accounts for the 2 Months to 30 September 2025
Report 3	Budget Update 2025/26
Report 4	Fees & Charges Policy 2026/27
Report 5	Bad Debt Write-off
Report 6	Business Support Centre Update

Staffing Reports

Report S1	Executive Summary – HR Services Annual Report
Report S2	HR Services Annual Report
Report S3	Executive Summary – Health & Wellbeing Programme, Semester 1

Client Services Reports

Report C1	Data Protection/Compliance Update
Report C2	Equality Report

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 4 November 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, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Report 3 Budget Update 2025/26

The Budget reflects reduced teaching costs, additional DfE funding and a breakeven position to March 2026. The Finance Director reported that Traineeship funding will be approximately £490k.

PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

The prompt payment for the 30 days to 30 October 2025 was 99% and the year to date was 95%.

Report 4 Fees & Charges Policy 2026/27

The Policy was updated to reflect relatively modest changes in certain fees and charges for the 2026/27 academic year.

PROPOSED, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Mrs D Creevy

Report 5 Bad Debt Write-off

The Board approved the write-off for £6,936 (12 individual debts), noting strong performance in debt management.

PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Mr P Thompson

Report 6 Business Support Centre Update

The Centre is on track to meet annual targets. The Committee agreed to enhance reporting with more qualitative commentary and to invite Dr F Tuffy, Business Support Centre Manager to present at a future Committee/Governing Body meeting.

Staffing Matters

The Board discussed workforce planning, to encourage industry professionals to apply for College posts and to develop new roles for existing staff, particularly in the trade areas.

It was suggested that this topic be explored further at the Strategy Day.

Absence & Wellbeing: FE sector benchmarking data for 2024/25 indicates, within College, an average of 9.5 days of teaching staff absence and 12 days for non-teaching staff per employee. Overall, College absence was 11 days per employee against the sector average of 10.2 days. Personal stress was identified as the primary cause of absence. Supporting staff and addressing absence remains a priority.

Learning & Development: Staff Conference on 'AI, The Future for Higher and Further Education' was held on 27 October 2025. 150 staff attended. **The Committee Chair suggested it would be useful to receive an update on embedding of and the practical use of AI in the College and for AI to be included within the Strategy Day Agenda.**

118.8 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs M Gormley, Committee Vice 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 11 November 2025

Report 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

Report 4 Annual Report to the Audit & Risk Committee for 2024/25 to the Governing Body

Report 5 NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance

Report 6 Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2025

- Report 7 Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2025
Report 8 Student Council Report Internal Audit Plan 2025-2028 and Internal Audit Annual Plan 2025/26
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Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 11 November 2025

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 3 Report to the Audit & Risk Committee

The Board was informed of updates to the Corporate Risk Register, which currently comprises ten corporate risks. Notably, Risk COR0007, 'Failure to Maintain Financial Stability' has been reassessed, with its risk score reduced due to increased funding from the Department (DfE).

Health & Safety – the College recorded one incident that was reportable to the Health and Safety Executive under RIDDOR regulations during the period 2024/25.

Report 4 Annual Report to the Audit & Risk Committee for 2024/25 to the Governing Body

The Board accepted the Report from the Committee.

PROPOSED, Mrs S McMahon

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

Report 5 NIAO Draft Report To Those Charged With Governance

The Comptroller and Auditor General is expected to certify the 2024/25 Financial Statements with an unqualified audit opinion, without modification. One uncorrected misstatement of approximately £261k was noted, which would increase expenditure and decrease net assets. A priority 2 recommendation was made regarding asset management; as of 31 July 2025, 126 assets remain in operational use at £nil book value.

Report 6 Annual Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2025

The Audit & Risk Committee were recommending approval to the Board.

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

Report 7 Student Council Report & Financial Statements Year Ended 31 July 2025

The Board approved the Student Council Report & Financial Statements.

PROPOSED, Mrs C Shongo

SECONDED, Ms V Toland

Report 8 Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2025-2028 and Internal Audit Annual Plan 2025/26

The Committee welcomed the appointment of the new Internal Auditor, Mr D Archibald, Henderson Loggie. It was recommended that some the contingency days be allocated for a review of workforce/succession planning, an area that has not been audited in several years.

The Board approved both the Strategic Internal Audit Plan 2025-28 and Internal Annual Plan for 2025/26.

PROPOSED, Mrs M Gormley

SECONDED, Mrs C Shongo

The Board agreed that the Governing Body Secretary should utilize the Microsoft Copilot transcription tool for future Audit & Risk Committee meetings to enhance efficiency through artificial intelligence.

PROPOSED, Mr F Smyth

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

118.9 CORRESPONDENCE

- Correspondence was received on 31 October 2025 from the Department (DfE) regarding Governor recruitment competitions. **The Governing Body Chair will engage with the Department to discuss the timeline for the College.**
- On 3 November 2025, the Governing Body Chair and Principal issued a letter of appreciation to Ms L Watson, Director of FE, DfE following her attendance at the HE graduation ceremony. A letter of thanks was subsequently received from Ms Watson.


118.10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

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

118.11 REFLECTON ON EFFECTIVENESS OF MEETING

It was noted that it is preferable that Governing Body meetings are held face-to-face however due to the weather warning in place the meeting was transferred to remote.

The Governing Body Chair concluded the open session of the meeting at 19:29 after which Reserved Business was addressed.

Signed 
Prof M Ó'Neill, Governing Body Chair

Date 23 January 2026