
MINUTES OF THE ONE HUNDRED AND SEVENTEENTH 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 B Dougherty (from 17:15)
Dr S Fisher
Mrs O McEleney
Ms C McGee
Mrs S McMahan
Mr L Murphy, Principal & Chief Executive
Mr B O'Neill
Ms V Toland

IN ATTENDANCE

Mr P McKeown, Finance Director
Dr C O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum & Academic Standards
Mr T Moore, PL in Digital Learning, Quality & Performance (for presentation and training items only)
Mrs É Doherty, Secretary to the Governing Body

REMOTE ATTENDANCE

Mrs D Creevy
Mrs M Gormley
Ms S Kelly, Head of HR (from 18:02)
Ms G Moss, Head of Client Services (from 17:07)
Mrs C Shongo (from 17:21)
Mr F Smyth

APOLOGIES

Mr P Clancy
Mr P Thompson

117.0 PRESENTATION & TRAINING – Mr T Moore, PL in Digital Learning, Quality & Performance

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 NWRC Digital Learning Strategy 2025/26
Report 2 Learning & Skills Digital Strategy – Magilligan

Mr Moore provided a Power Point presentation on the Digital Learning Strategy 2025/26. This included detail on the Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) Team who

delivers mentoring, training and support across all vocational areas. The Team helps develop digital skills of staff and preparing students to become proficient digital citizens. Sustainability awareness of the impact of technology and the safe and ethical use of Generative AI together with the positive use of AI was discussed. Mr Moore covered the areas of the competency frameworks and recognised qualifications, rewarding achievement, TEL Staff Awards and the College improvement processes. The Digital Learning Strategy also ensures the accessibility of teaching resources to comply with Section 75 of the NI Act 1998. The KPIs for 2025/26 were noted. The College Annual Conference in October 2025 will focus on the implementation of GenAI in education and fostering collaboration among educators and industry experts.

Mr Moore provided a short demonstration on the use of AI through Microsoft 365 Copilot. A question and answer session followed.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mr Moore for his informative presentation and demonstration.

Mr Moore left the meeting at this juncture. Due to technical difficulties with the remote platform the Board meeting commenced at approximately 16:15.

117.1 WELCOME

The Governing Body Chair extended a warm welcome to all and formally introduced Ms Clare McGee recently appointed co-opted Governor to the Board.

117.2 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 – September 2025

An update was received from all Governors during the summer period. Mr O'Neill indicated his details were not included in the Report. The Governing Body Secretary apologised and noted the Report will be duly amended.

117.3 DRAFT MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD ON 18 JUNE 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, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty

Report 1 MATTERS ARISING – Verbal Report

116.4 Ms McGee was formally appointed as a Board member on 16 September 2025.

116.4 The External Board Effectiveness Review Action Plan is on the Agenda, Ref GB 117.4, Report 1.

116.6 The presentation from Mr T Moore took place at the beginning of the meeting. (Ref 117.0).

116.8 An expression of interest was sent out to relevant board members to consider taking on the role as Chair of the Resources Committee. Mr F Smyth kindly accepted this role.

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

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO MEMBERS

Report 1 ICS External Board Effectiveness Review - Action Plan

The Governing Body Secretary brought members through the Draft Action Plan. Members were content with the actions noted.

Report 2 Governor Assessments – verbal update

The Governor Body Chair noted that the individual Governor Assessment were almost complete. He thanked members for their participation in the process.

Report 3 Committee Membership – verbal update

The Governing Body Chair noted Dr Kennedy's recent resignation. The Board acknowledged Dr Kennedy's contribution to the Board. **A formal note will be sent to Dr Kennedy on behalf of the Board.**

The Governing Body Chair requested members who were currently serving on one Committee to consider serving on a further Committee.

A request will formally be sent to Governors.

The Board approved the appointment of Ms McGee as a member of the Resources Committee.

PROPOSED, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 4 Sector & College Business – verbal report

Following engagement with the Minister and the Department (DfE) the reformed CEF constitution will be amended. Prof M Ó Néill is Chair of Sector Chair's Group for the next two years and is on his final year as Chair of CEF.

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

The Principal provided an update to the Board regarding progress on the City Deal Projects. Progress on the ICT appointment for the Derry City & Strabane new Campus project has not been as expected. CPD has advised the PQQ documents to appoint a design team (ICT) will now go out at the end of September 2025. Governor, Mr F Smyth expressed his concern on the high risks with these projects, in particular the delays with the new Campus in Strabane. Unless the Project gets back on schedule this will result in a delay in taking possession of the

new College building. This will also impact the WHSCT who are moving into the current Strabane Campus site.

A further potential project is the consideration of a joint project with DCSDC and Ulster University within the Strand Road Campus. The Draft OBC will be brought to the Board.

Causeway Growth Deal – Foodovation & Skills Centre, Limavady Campus

Minister John O'Dowd and Minister Dr Caoimhe Archibald visited Limavady Campus in August to discuss the Project. The OBC is included within the Board papers (Ref 117.8, Report 5.1).

Dr Caoimhe Archibald visited the Strand Road Campus on 14 August 2025 to meet students receiving their exam results and she also met the College Senior Management Team.

The Principal noted that a meeting will be scheduled between the College and DfE to provide DfE with an update on the City Deal Projects.

The Department (DfE) have asked the College to produce a three year strategic Corporate Plan. Governors will have input to this at the Strategy Day.

The Principal briefed the Board on the industrial relations and various funding that has been secured to support strategic programmes and initiatives.

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

117.6 AUDIT & RISK COMMITTEE – Mrs M Gormley, Committee Vice Chair

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

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| Report 1 | Committee Chair's Summary Report |
| Report 2 | Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on 9 September 2025 |
| Report 3 | Report to the Audit & Risk Committee |
| Report 4 | Review of Committee's Terms of Reference |
| Report 4.1 | Summary of Proposed Changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference |

The Committee Vice Chair reported that the IT Services Manager delivered a comprehensive update on Cyber Security and mitigation strategies currently in place at the Committee meeting.

The changes to risk scoring and other updates in relation to the Corporate Risk Register were reported, key points included;

Risk COR0002: Impact of Reduced Enrolment Numbers - score: very high

Initial data indicates growth in enrolment numbers; this risk will be reviewed and updated as the term progresses.

Risk COR0007 – Failure to Maintain Financial Stability – score: severe

The College continues to report a deficit position. No additional funds were made available to the College in the June monitoring round; however, bids have been resubmitted to the October monitoring round. A revision of the budget will be undertaken in Autumn 2025 to reflect the updated financial position, including actual enrolments, this will be brought to November 2025 Board meeting.

Risk COR00011: Impact of Industrial Action – score: medium

The scoring has reduced as pay awards for 2024/25 and 2025/26 have been agreed and conditions are currently being worked through.

The Financial Statements have been prepared in accordance with the Accounts Direction and relevant accounting standards. The College submitted the Annual Report and Financial Statements to the Department (DfE) on 22 September 2025. Subject to a legislative amendment, the financial year will now move to 31 March with effect from 2026 resulting in one external audit taking place per year.

Internal Auditor – The Committee received the Annual Internal Audit Report for 12 months ending 31 July 2025. The report indicated a satisfactory system of governance, risk management and control. Whilst there may be some residual risk identified, this should not significantly impact on achievement of system objectives.

The Finance Director notified the Board that the provision of Internal Audit Services for the Sector has been awarded to Henderson Loggie. The Finance Director will liaise with the Chair of the Audit & Risk Committee on the proposed upcoming audits and the Audit Plan for 2025/26 will come to the next Committee/Board meetings.

External Audit - DfE group accounts for Year Ended March 2025 have concluded and there are no significant concerns to report. Work will now commence on the 31 July 2025 audit.

Direct Award Contract - There was one direct award contract for the support and hosting of the finance system. The College submitted a DAC on behalf of the sector to maintain continuity whilst a robust procurement exercise is undertaken. The DAC was approved by the DoF and DfE's Permanent Secretary in August 2025.

The Finance Director reported that the providers for the College HR system have recently advised this contract will be sub-contacted in March 2026. The contract was due to be completed in November 2027.

**Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Audit & Risk Committee Meeting held on
9 September 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 C Shongo

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Report 4 Review of Committee's Terms of Reference

Report 4.1 Summary of Proposed Changes to the Committee's Terms of Reference

The Board approved the Committee's Terms of Reference.

PROPOSED, Ms V Toland

SECONDED, Mrs S McMahon

The Governing Body Chair thanked Mrs Gormley and invited Dr Fisher to present the Education Committee Report to the Board.

117.7 EDUCATION COMMITTEE – Dr S Fisher, Committee Vice Chair

PREVIOUSLY ISSUED TO ALL MEMBERS

Report 1 Committee Chair's Summary Report of the Education Committee Meeting held on 16 September 2025

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Education Committee Meeting held on 16 September 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, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Mr B O'Neill

Mr Clancy, Governor and Dr O'Mullan, Head of Curriculum & Academic Standards attended the Department of Education's consultation event held at Southern Regional College. The event addressed legislative changes concerning 16–18-year-olds.

College Development Plan 2024/25 - The College had a strong performance against its 2024/25 College Development Plan (CDP) targets. The College surpassed enrolment targets in several categories. The College achieved 13,500 enrolments across 8,045 individuals—98% of its target and a 6% increase over the previous academic year.

College Development Plan 2025/26 - Preliminary data for the 2025/26 academic year (as of 11 September 2025) showed a strong start in enrolments. There has been a noted increase in full-time enrolments in FE, Level 1 and Level 3 programmes. However, the College is also facing challenges supporting students who require additional learning assistance but do not have formal Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

The Board approved the Draft College Development Plan 2025/26 at the June 2025 meeting. However following feedback from DfE on 18 September 2025, a few minor amendments are required to the CDP. **These will be circulated to Governors via email for their consideration and approval.**

Enrolments and Course Decisions - Course withdrawals, particularly in hairdressing, barbering and beauty programmes at the Strabane Campus were highlighted. Impacted students on course withdrawals were supported and redirected to suitable alternative courses. New additional courses were also added to the 2025/26 provision offer.

A significant policy update came with the Department for Education's withdrawal of funding for the AVTA Level 3 programme, effective from the end of the 2024/25 year. This change will require adjustments in curriculum planning and resource allocation.

Strategic Curriculum Matters - Changes to the Essential Skills framework were discussed in Committee. Level 2 Essential Skills qualifications will now be considered equivalent to 0.25 of a GCSE beginning in 2027/28 (tbc). This has raised sector-wide concerns and will affect learners' progression pathways. The College is already adjusting its curriculum by increasing provision for GCSE Maths and English.

The Committee expressed disappointment regarding the cessation of the WorldSkills Competitions and Educator Programme for 2025/26 due to DfE budget restrictions.

Quality Improvement- The Committee reviewed two Quality Improvement Action Plans submitted to the DfE, the Traineeship and the Essential Skills Plans. A full prison inspection is underway at HMP Magilligan, with NWRC's educational delivery being a component of the evaluation.

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) will conduct a sector-wide evaluation of SEN support in Further Education in October 2025.

The College achieved the highest student response rate within the FE sector for the National Student Survey (NSS), and second highest overall in Northern Ireland.

Validation has been secured for a new Level 6 Early Years Programme in collaboration with Stranmillis University College, pending DfE approval.

Client Services - It was reported that there was an increase in ESOL enrolments. Plans for inclusive events and community partnerships for the 2025/26 academic year were noted. The College has initiated additional partnerships, including the Bready Ulster-Scots Group.

The Governing Body Chair thanked Dr Fisher and invited Mr Smyth to present the Resources Committee Report to the Board.

117.8 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 11 September 2025
Report 3 Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 31 July 2025
Report 4 Business Support Centre Update
Report 5 Executive Summary – OBC Proposed Foodovation & Skills Centre
Report 5.1 OBC Proposed Foodovation & Skills Centre - link
Report 6 Budget Update

Client Services Papers

- Report C1 Equality & Good Relations Progress Report (Section 75) April 2024 – March 2025
Report C2 Equality Report
Report C3 Data Protection/Compliance Update

Report 2 Draft Minutes of the Resources Committee Meeting held on 11 September 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, Dr S Fisher

SECONDED, Mr L Murphy

Report 3 Statement of Comprehensive Income and Expenditure for the Year Ended 31 July 2025 - covered under Agenda item 117.6

Report 4 Business Support Centre Update

It is envisaged all targets will be achieved.

Report 5 Draft OBC Proposed Foodovation and Skills Centre – Causeway Growth Deal

Report 5.1 OBC Proposed Foodovation & Skills Centre - link

The Board had approved the Draft OBC at the June 2025 meeting. The draft was shared with Causeway Coast & Glens Council, DfE and InvestNI. Report 5 includes the changes made from comments received, none necessitated any substantial change to the Draft. The Board approved the amendments.

PROPOSED, Mr B O'Neill

SECONDED, Dr S Fisher

Report 6 Budget Update – reported earlier under Agenda item 117.6, Report 3.
The prompt payment figure for the 30 days for 31 August 2025 was 81% and the year to July 2025 was 95%. Compared to August 2024 the figure is reduced, mainly due to the holiday period and is expected to be back in line for September 2025.

The Committee Chair reported on the staffing matters. In relation to recruitment the Committee Chair noted the considerable number of posts that have been advertised which can be labour intensive for the HR staff. Ms S Kelly, Head of HR reported on some 'hard to fill' posts in areas of CNC, welding and plumbing. New posts have been developed for Technician Assessor from existing staff which has proved beneficial.

Report C1 Equality & Good Relations Progress Report (Sect 75) Apr 2024 – Mar 2025
The Report relates to the implementation of Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. Equality issues continue to remain a prominent feature on the Governing Body and Leadership and Management Team agendas. The Committee Chair acknowledged the extensive work of the staff in their commitment to this area and in the promotion of equality.
PROPOSED, Mrs S McMahon
SECONDED, Mr B Dougherty


Report C2 Equality Update
Reported previously under Agenda item 117.7.

Report C3 Data Protection/Compliance Update
Members noted the report.

117.9 CORRESPONDENCE
Other than correspondence already reported throughout the meeting, the College notified the Department (DfE) of Dr Kennedys' resignation from the Board on 18 September 2025.

117.10 ANY OTHER BUSINESS
There was no any other business declared earlier in the meeting.

The Governing Body Chair concluded the open session of the meeting at 19:32 after which Reserved Business was addressed.

Signed, 
Prof M Ó'Neill, Governing Body Chair

Date, 19 November 2025