

Department for the
Economy
An Roinn
Geilleagair
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GUIDE FOR GOVERNORS OF NORTHERN IRELAND FURTHER EDUCATION COLLEGES

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FOREWORD

Welcome to the Guide for Governors of NI Further Education (FE) Colleges.

Thank you for taking on the vital and challenging role of governor and be assured that the Department for the Economy (DfE) greatly values the commitment you have made.

The Department is focused on supporting a range of actions to grow our economy and develop a highly skilled workforce. Our goal is for FE colleges to be widely recognised as providers of high quality economically relevant skills. We want colleges to achieve excellence in delivering the right skills for economic success, and be ambitious for both learners and the contribution colleges can make to improve our economic competitiveness. Consequently, our FE sector has two key functions:

- taking a pivotal role in generating a strong and vibrant economy through the development of professional and technical skills, increasingly at higher levels, and by helping employers and their workforce to innovate; and
- supporting social inclusion by providing those with low or no qualifications, or who have other barriers to learning, with the skills and qualifications needed to find employment and become economically active.

The FE Order 1997 states that the general duties of governing bodies are as follows;

(1) It shall be the duty of the governing body of an institution of further education—

(a) to secure the efficient and effective management of the institution; and

(b) to ensure that the institution provides, or secures the provision of, suitable and efficient further education to students of the institution.

(2) In carrying out its duty under paragraph (1), the governing body of an institution of further education shall have regard to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age who have learning difficulties.

(3) In carrying out its duty under paragraph (1) (b), the governing body of an institution of further education shall have regard to—

(a) the provision of education in the area in which the institution is situated; and

(b) the educational needs of industry and commerce, and the community, in that area.

In your role as a governor, it is important that you work constructively with Governing Body colleagues and the College Executive Team to ensure that your college delivers against these responsibilities.

If the Governing Body is to be effective, you must make a strong contribution by bringing your own skills and experience to every meeting and every issue. Robust governance is essential, adds real value and supports better decision making within the college. Working in partnership with the Department and in support of its aims, governing bodies

can ensure the focus on excellence in skills provision for the benefit of the learners and the businesses it supports.

The Department wishes you every success in your role and we hope you find it worthwhile and fulfilling.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Being a member of a college Governing Body carries a public profile and brings a number of responsibilities. Along with your fellow governors, you share the responsibility of addressing the skills needs of our business community and supporting the development of thousands of people, in order to help sustain and grow our economy.

Northern Ireland has six regional FE colleges – Belfast Metropolitan College, Northern Regional College, North West Regional College, South Eastern Regional College, Southern Regional College and South West College.

The Minister for the Economy sets the strategic direction for the FE sector. An overview of the current strategic frameworks is contained in Appendix 1. A college Governing Body is responsible for ensuring the effective management of the college's skills provision, planning the college's future development and fulfilling key governance functions regarding college resources, including the senior management team and college staff. Working with the college Principal/Chief Executive, the Governing Body is the highest level of decision making and has ultimate responsibility for all of the college's affairs.

This guide provides information and advice for governing bodies and individual governors. It is only intended to be an introductory resource. Appendix 1 provides an overview of important publications that every governor should be aware of, which provide the detail behind this guide and can be referred to when reading it.

Unless the context otherwise requires, throughout the Guide, the terms 'member' and 'governor', mean a member of the Governing Body and include the Chairperson and the vice-chairperson.

1.1 About This Guide

Overview of the Guide

Section 1	Introduction
Section 2	What is a Governing Body and what does it do?
Section 3	What is a Governor and what do they do?
Appendix 1	What else do I need to know and read?
Appendix 2	Useful Abbreviations and Acronyms
Appendix 3	Fact Sheets

This guide aims to provide a useful reference tool for new and experienced governors. It seeks to explain the key roles of the:

- Department in providing high level direction on policy and critical processes, such as Departmental skills priorities and also, adherence to public sector accounting and governance standards; and
- Governing Body Chair/members, including their main responsibilities and the way in which they authorise the direction and control of the College.

It begins with a picture of what a Governing Body is and what it does (section 2), and goes on to deal with the individual governor and the various roles and responsibilities that governors are expected to undertake (section 3). The appendices contain supplementary information and links to key documents which will be useful to you in your role.

The guide is not a legally authoritative text. The authoritative definition of the powers and responsibilities of governors is that set out within legislation and in the Instrument and Articles of Government (known as the Instrument and Articles respectively) of each college (see Appendix 1 for further details).

Where reference is made to the 1997 Order, this refers to the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 which provides the statutory basis for FE in Northern Ireland.

Feedback on this guide is always welcome. Please send comments to the Department's Further Education Corporate Governance and Accountability Team at: e-mail - fegovernance@economy-ni.gov.uk.

1.2 Further Education in Northern Ireland

Further Education is defined by the 1997 Order as:

- full-time and part-time education suitable to the requirements of persons over compulsory school age (including vocational training); and
- organised leisure-time occupation provided in conjunction with the provision of such education.

Embedding a culture of lifelong learning in all sections of the community is a key policy objective for government and FE colleges have a vital role in helping to achieve this.

The programmes offered by colleges can be broadly split into two categories: regulated[1] and non-regulated[2] enrolments. Courses are offered from entry level to degree level.[3] With a strong focus on professional and technical qualifications, colleges tend to be more influenced by the demands of the economy and requirements of their local communities than most other educational institutions.

Colleges cater for a wide range of learners, from school pupils, via the entitlement framework, through to adults up to and beyond retirement age. Participation is encouraged through flexibility of provision at all levels including full-time and part-time (day and/or evening) attendance, face to face and e-learning methodologies and incorporation of work-based learning.

Colleges are also key delivery organisations for government funded schemes, including traineeships, apprenticeships, youth training and employment, innovation and skills focus schemes. Programmes of study can therefore vary significantly from college to college. Information on FE sector activity, including enrolments, can be found within the FE statistics and research section of the Department's website or obtained from your college.

The Department sets the strategic direction for the FE sector as a whole in Northern Ireland. The aim is to develop a world class FE sector, financially efficient and with strong governance; a sector with state of the art facilities; a sector which is collaborative, responsive and adaptive to learner and employer needs; a sector which plays a vital role in delivering skills for the economy which provide high quality skills and support services for learners and employers aligned to economic priorities; and which supports social inclusion.

This central direction is supplemented by individual colleges establishing their own strategies, and developing a curriculum offering education, training and other services to meet the needs of learners and employers in their area. It is further underpinned by annual

[1] Regulated enrolments are on courses at 'level 3' or below that appear on Register of Regulated Qualifications (RRQ). This contains qualifications on both the Qualifications and Credit Framework and the National Qualifications Framework or part of the Department's Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications and Higher Education qualifications ('level 4 and above').

[2] Non-regulated enrolments are those which either potentially lead to a formal qualification at 'level 3' or below, but do not appear on the RRQ or do not lead to a formal qualification - typically hobby and leisure, or recreational courses.

[3] NI qualifications are grouped into nine levels, from entry level to level 8. The level refers to difficulty of each qualification e.g. entry level recognises basic knowledge or skills, whilst level 8 recognises leading experts or practitioners in a particular field or profession.

college business plans referred to as College Development Plans (CDPs). Each college CDP sets the scene of how the college fits into the wider DfE delivery aims and objectives. Further details on the CDP process are provided at section 2.5.

2. What is a Governing Body and what does it do?

Section Overview

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2.2 How does a Governing Body work?
2.3 Role of a Governing Body
2.4 Role of the Department
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2.1 Introduction

A Governing Body is the corporate board of an FE college. As set out in Article 13 of the 1997 Order, a Governing Body is responsible for: securing the efficient and effective management of the college: and, ensuring that the college provides suitable further education for students in the area in which the college is situated and the needs of industry and commerce and the community in that area. Like all corporate boards, it must operate effective governance systems and be seen to act in accordance with the highest standards of propriety.

This chapter details what this means in practice, what the role of the Governing Body is, how the Governing Body functions and how it relates to its external stakeholders.

2.2 How does a Governing Body work?

Governing bodies are legal entities established in accordance with the Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 and are appointed under the authority of and are accountable to the Minister for the Economy. The Governing Body has to ensure the college is managed efficiently and effectively in line with statutory obligations and relevant guidance from DfE and the Department of Finance (DoF).

The principles applying to the conduct of meetings of the Governing Body are the same as those applying to a well-conducted meeting of any similar body. Most items of business should be supported by a paper and minutes should be taken of all decisions. The minutes should be signed off by the Chair, or in the Chair's absence, the vice-Chair or other member acting as Chair, and a copy provided to the Department by the Secretary. A Governing Body will also have a number of committees which will deal with much of the detailed Governing Body business. Further detail on the committee system is in section 2.8.

Staff and students of the college and members of the general public should have access to information about proceedings of the Governing Body. Agendas and minutes of meetings should be made available as soon as possible, by publication on the website or upon request. The Secretary and all members of the Governing Body should be aware of their obligations under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 and Data Protection Act 2018 (which encompasses General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)).

As with any other corporate board, it is critically important there:

- are robust processes and systems in place and that these are complemented by an appropriate culture on the Governing Body that encourages trust among members,
- is a willingness to challenge assumptions and beliefs; and
- is ongoing analysis and, where appropriate, critical assessment of individual and collective performance to achieve better results.

A Governing Body acts by making decisions within the constraints of legislation and good practice and ensuring that those decisions are acted on.

The constitution and procedures of the Governing Body are covered by Articles 11, 12 and Schedule 3 of the 1997 Order. Each Governing Body has Articles and an Instrument of Government which set out its conduct and constitution respectively. Rules of procedure for the conduct of the Governing Body and committee meetings can be found in the Articles. A Governing Body may also have standing orders; these are subservient to the Articles and Instrument. In addition, a Governing Body must abide by the terms of the Partnership Agreement (PA) and DoF's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI). It is important that you are familiar with these documents as they are critical to the successful operation of the college and all elements must be adhered to. In particular, the PA establishes the partnership arrangements between the Department and the College and explains the overall governance framework within which the College operates.

You should note that powers within Schedule 3 of the 1997 Order allow the Department to intervene in the running of a college if any individual member/members of, or the Governing Body itself, are considered to be in breach of any of the respective responsibilities.

In addition to your individual college Articles and Instrument, which your Secretary will provide you with, the model Instrument and Articles are available on the Department's website Model Instrument and Articles of Government. The Secretary should advise the Chair if, at any time, it appears that your Governing Body is in breach of the rules and procedures.

2.3 Role of a Governing Body

The 1997 Order and the Articles define the roles and responsibilities of the Governing Body and its committees and of the Principal/Chief Executive. The Governing Body is responsible for ensuring the college, for which it is responsible, is managed efficiently and

effectively and the vocational and academic programmes of the college reflect the college's educational character and mission, and meet the strategic priorities which the Department has set for FE. It is responsible for the financial and academic performance of the college and the quality of its teaching, learning and assessment. The main powers of a Governing Body, set out in articles 14, 15 and 16 of the 1997 Order are:

- to provide further, higher and, in particular circumstances, secondary education;
- to charge fees and to provide students with appropriate financial/other assistance;
- to manage the institution; and
- to supply goods/services in connection with their provision of education, including making available their facilities and the expertise of their staff.

The composition of a Governing Body is set out within Schedule 3 of the 1997 Order. Each Governing Body has 12 to 18 members, as follows:

- One is the Chair (public appointment)
- Not less than half who appear to the Department to be, or have been, engaged or employed in business, industry or any profession (public appointments)
- One is the college Principal/Chief Executive
- Not less than one, nor more than two, are elected by persons employed at the college from among such persons
- One is elected by students of the college from among such students, and
- Two may be co-opted by the existing members of the Governing Body.

The Governing Body must guide the strategy of the college in line with the priorities set by the Department and the NI Executive. In doing so it is critical the Governing Body provides and exercises both a support and a challenge function in respect of the Principal/Chief Executive and the executive team. Individual Governing Body members should bring independence, objectivity, impartiality and expertise to both college decision making and challenge processes.

Governing bodies are entrusted with public funds and therefore have a particular duty to observe the highest standards of corporate governance at all times and to ensure they are discharging their duties with due regard for the proper conduct of public business.

The Governing Body is the highest level of decision making in the college and has a responsibility to lead by example. It must act and be seen to act in accordance with the highest standards of propriety at all times. Guiding principles for a Governing Body are, the Governing Body must:

- observe the highest standards of integrity and objectivity in the transaction of all its business, and particularly in the management of funds;
- ensure that the college acts within its proper authority, as delineated by legislation, the Instrument and Articles of Government and the PA;
- wherever possible, follow a policy of openness and transparency;
- be accountable for the activities of the college and for the stewardship of public funds;

- maximise value for money by ensuring that services are delivered in the most effective, efficient and economical way.

The Governing Body should have an appropriate balance of skills, experience, and knowledge to enable it to discharge its duties effectively. Governing bodies also have specific roles in relation to staff, students, audit and risk which are discussed later in this chapter.

The role of the Governing Body is not to manage the day-to-day running of the college, which includes organisation, direction and management of the college and leadership of the staff; this is the responsibility of the Principal/Chief Executive. The Governing Body has an oversight role however, and should hold the Principal/Chief Executive to account for these responsibilities.

2.4 Role of the Department

The six colleges are classified as Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) and carry out their functions at arm's length from the Department. As NDPBs, they carry out functions on behalf of the Department; are legally incorporated with their own legal identity and their own legislation (the 1997 Order); employ their own staff; are allocated their own budgets; and publish their own business plans, annual reports and accounts.

Details of the Department's legislative powers in relation to FE colleges (funding, appointments to Governing Body, etc) can be found in the 1997 Order. The Department sets the strategic direction for the FE sector, including the policies, priorities and targets, which are implemented through the annual CDP process.

The Department is responsible for ensuring all funding is used for its designated purpose and has an oversight role in relation to annual, audited accounts which the college must submit, showing that funding has been spent appropriately. The Department's Minister is ultimately responsible to the Assembly for each college's performance. The Department's Permanent Secretary is accountable for the funds allocated and designates the Principal/Chief Executive of each college as the college Accounting Officer. In this way there is a line of authority from each college to the Assembly.

In practice most of the responsibilities of the Minister and Departmental Accounting Officer are delegated to the Lead Official in the Department, the Director of FE, to discharge.

The PA sets outs the terms and conditions under which funding is made available to colleges, provides a clear framework of strategic control for the college and, sets out the foundation of the governance framework and working relationship between the Department and its NDPBs moving forward.

The Economy Minister and the Department appoint all members of the Governing Body, selecting over half the membership through public competition, adhering to the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland Code of Practice. As detailed

in section 3.3, the Department arranges governance training and administers an annual assessment process for members and Chairs.

2.5 Strategic Planning and Funding

As the corporate board of the institution, a Governing Body needs to ensure that it keeps a focus on the strategic direction and vision of the college. The Articles place responsibility on the Governing Body for determining, within the framework of the 1997 Order, the educational character and mission of the college. The Governing Body should take into account the advice and guidance received from the Department and college management, particularly the Principal/Chief Executive, one of whose duties is to make proposals to the Governing Body about these aspects of college governance. Governors should establish, in conjunction with the Principal/Chief Executive, a framework within which the college is to operate and ensure this direction is right for both the economy and the community.

The educational character of the college is its broad purpose and strategic direction, the nature of its educational programme, the pattern of its courses, any special characteristics of the range of subjects taught, the overall ethos of the college, its admissions policy and its relationship to the community it serves. This includes the balance of provision within the college in terms of the volume and breadth of professional and technical provision; training provision; academic provision; higher level provision; and recreational or leisure course provision (at full cost recovery).

On a more regular basis, the Governing Body should be particularly concerned with the development and delivery of medium and long term objectives for the college. The CDP process is an annual, cyclical exercise commissioned by the Department. Article 20 of the 1997 Order requires each college to submit a CDP to the Department on an annual basis. These underpin the FE sector corporate plan.

Along with financial reports, the annual CDP assists the Governing Body to make informed strategic decisions and oversee resources in accordance with its strategic priorities. The Department issues annual guidance for its completion. This guidance also provides key information on which budget allocation decisions are made and communicated to the colleges each year. The resource consumption requirements of colleges are funded via monthly grant-in-aid payments. Colleges are required to adopt an ‘Outcomes Based Accountability’ (OBA) planning approach which applies to all NICS Departments and each of its NDPBs. This approach focuses on societal outcomes and is built around the concept of report cards which set out ‘how much did we do?’, ‘how well did we do it?’ and ‘is anyone better off?’. FE colleges must ensure their annual CDPs clearly articulate how proposed funding and college activity will directly support Departmental strategic priorities to give effect to the direction set by the NI Executive.

2.6 Audit and risk

The management of audit and risk is a key role of the Governing Body. Each Governing Body must have an audit committee to oversee the internal audit function and make recommendations to the full Governing Body based on audit findings. The audit committee also oversees the risk management system in the college.

Risks for colleges can range from failure to recruit and/or retain the planned for number of students to a failure to secure financial stability. The college should put controls in place to ease the impact or likelihood of a risk occurring. The status of each risk should be monitored on an ongoing basis.

2.7 Monitoring performance

A crucial part of the work of a Governing Body is the regular monitoring of all aspects of the college's performance. Whilst this is usually done through the work of committees, which report to the full Governing Body, it is essential that the Governing Body establishes what it wishes to monitor, how it will monitor and agrees a reporting schedule with the Principal/Chief Executive. A key element of this process will include the consideration and review of CDP progress reports which are submitted to the Department to monitor and track progress against targets/outcome deliverables.

2.8 Committees

The Governing Body will delegate some of its work to committees. All colleges are required to establish an audit committee under the 1997 Order and a finance and general purposes committee under their Articles. The Governing Body may also choose to establish a staffing committee and an education committee. The names given to committees can vary between colleges. Your Governing Body's committee structure will be reflected in your college's Articles.

The Governing Body can make decisions on the membership and the terms of reference of any committees. For the four standard committees, Part IV of the model Articles sets out details of membership, membership restrictions and roles and responsibilities of each with respect to the governance framework. Tables 2.1 and 2.2 below provide a summary of this. Specific detail regarding the audit committee can be found in DoF's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI).

Table 2.1 Membership of Governing Body committees

Audit Committee
• At least four members (other than the Principal and Chief Executive). No members shall also sit on the Finance and General Purposes Committee. The chair should be a Business, Industry and Professional member • The governing body chair cannot be a member or chair of the committee • Must meet at least four times in each year.
Finance and General Purposes Committee
• At least four members, of whom at least two are Business, Industry and Professional members, and the Principal and Chief Executive
Education Committee
• At least four members (other than the Principal and Chief Executive, staff and student members), and the Principal and Chief Executive
Staffing Committee
• At least four members (other than the Principal and Chief Executive, staff and student members), and the Principal and Chief Executive

Table 2.2 Roles and responsibilities of committees

Audit Committee
• Authorised to investigate any activity within its terms of reference - all staff and Governing Body members are required to co-operate with it. • Provide a channel of communication from the college's auditors, not controlled by College management. • Ensure that internal control systems, including audit activities, of the college are monitored actively, independently and objectively.
Finance and General Purposes Committee
• Determine or advise the governing body on matters relating to the estimates, budget and presentation of the accounts of the college.

Education Committee
• Oversee college curricular provision, especially nature, quality and performance of the provision and the extent to which it meets the needs of the community the college seeks to serve.
Staffing Committee
• Oversee college staffing framework/ issues

The minutes of committee meetings should be circulated to all members of the Governing Body within ten days of a meeting, either as the agreed or draft version, subject to any confidentiality rules. All committee meeting minutes should be ratified by the full Governing Body.

2.9 Relationship between the Principal/Chief Executive and the Governing Body

The Principal/Chief Executive is the main liaison between the day-to-day running of the college, for which they have responsibility, and the Governing Body. They will make proposals to the Governing Body about the educational nature and mission of the college. The Principal/Chief Executive will also keep the Governing Body informed about the college's affairs, enabling the Governing Body to carry out the requirements of its role. As a Governing Body, you will wish to take into account the advice and guidance received from college management, particularly the Principal/Chief Executive. Governors should establish, in collaboration with the Principal/Chief Executive, a broad framework within which the college is to operate and develop and ensure that it is the right one for the sub-region served by the college.

The relationship between the Principal/Chief Executive and the Governing Body is complex. On the one hand, the Principal/Chief Executive is a member of the Governing Body with an equal say in discussions and decisions. On the other, they are appointed by the Governing Body, are accountable to the Governing Body, and have their performance assessed by the Governing Body.

At the same time, the Department's Permanent Secretary (as the Departmental Accounting Officer) appoints the Principal/Chief Executive as the Accounting Officer for the college. The college Accounting Officer is personally responsible for safeguarding the public funds for which they have charge; for ensuring propriety and regularity in the handling of those public funds; and for the day-to-day operations and management of the college. The responsibilities of an Accounting Officer are set out in detail in the PA, Managing Public Money NI and the Accounting Officer appointment letter. Further details on the Principal/Chief Executive's role as a Governing Body member are set out in Section 3.4.2.

It should be noted that the Governing Body is separately responsible for promoting the efficient, economic and effective use of staff and other resources of the college.

The relationships between the Department, Governing Body and Principal/Chief Executive are designed to ensure there are adequate checks and balances in the system. Each component of the system has to give recognition to the responsibilities of the others while ensuring that they fulfil their own responsibilities.

2.10 External relationships

A Governing Body should have an understanding of the college's role in its sub-region and community and in the development of broader regional interests, such as a successful economy and an active labour market. A Governing Body has a role to ensure the Principal/Chief Executive and other senior staff are aware of what demand exists for particular courses, enabling appropriate provision to be made, as well as being aware of broader social and economic needs. A Governing Body should endeavour to have available a range of information to inform strategic decisions. This includes an awareness of the direction of government policy for the sector, as well as local conditions specific to each college.

Key external relationships which contribute to the development of the college's strategy include those with other education and training providers in the area in particular with universities in the delivery of higher education provision in colleges, with schools in the delivery of policies for 14 to 19 year olds, and with local businesses, councils, planning agencies and employer organisations. Constructive and reciprocal links with these bodies assist the Governing Body in assessing the region's skills and training needs and in ascertaining what other provision is available in the area.

2.11 Student discipline, suspension and appeals

Each college must have a student disciplinary code. This should be approved following consultation between the Governing Body and student representatives. This disciplinary code should set out a code of conduct and behaviour expected of all students and the procedures to be followed should the code be breached.

The college may, without notice, expel a student for gross misconduct or other serious cause. In the case of an offence of general and habitual misconduct, the college may suspend a student pending further consideration as to the possibility of the student's expulsion.

Any student suspended or expelled is entitled to receive written notification of the suspension or expulsion. They are also entitled to appeal a suspension or expulsion, which includes a right to make oral representations for which purposes a student may be accompanied or represented by a friend.

The Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman is responsible for the investigation of complaints relating to FE where a complainant, such as a student, remains dissatisfied after the college's internal complaints process has been exhausted.

2.12 Staffing

The Governing Body is the employer of all staff in their college. Specific responsibilities for staff are set out in the college Articles, providing for powers given to governing bodies under the 1997 Order. These include the power to enter into contracts with staff (Article 14(1)(i)) and to determine staff terms and conditions (Schedule 3 paragraph 10(3)). In relation to the most senior college staff, the Department for the Economy also has an approval role set out in the Order. An example of these responsibilities is that a Governing Body has direct responsibility for the performance appraisal of the Principal/Chief Executive, but can delegate responsibility for the appraisal of all other staff to the Principal/Chief Executive, within an approved framework.

Governing bodies have responsibility for the pay and conditions of staff but, in line with the Articles, have delegated this to recognised negotiating committees to provide forums for negotiating terms and conditions on a sector wide basis.

The College Employers' Forum (CEF) is a collaborative network of the six colleges which develops good practice in relation to the employers' relationship with staff. CEF's major task is to arrange for the negotiation of pay, conditions of service and related issues through regional negotiation committees and agreed procedures. CEF has the authority to sign off collective agreements reached by the relevant negotiating committees.

There are three negotiating committees in operation, one for each of the following staff groups:

- Principal/Chief Executives and senior staff,
- Lecturers, and
- Support staff.

The remit of the negotiating committees extends to agreeing the terms (pay) and conditions of the staff within the above groups. They comprise representatives from both the employers and recognised unions. All pay awards across the FE sector are subject to approval by the Department and/or DoF, under the Executive's Public Sector Pay Policy and the DoF Pay Guidance Circular.

It is likely that you will be involved in some staffing issues during your time on the Governing Body. It is therefore important that you are aware of your role as a governor in this respect and of your college's rules and procedures on staffing matters. As with many issues, there is a demarcation of responsibilities between the Governing Body and the Principal/Chief Executive and these responsibilities are detailed in the Articles. It is also important that you are familiar with the framework established by the negotiating committees as these govern many issues.

2.13 Estates

The Governing Body has responsibility for setting the strategy for their college's estate and the oversight of that strategy. This strategy should be underpinned by the college's curriculum planning.

The Governing Body should ensure that it monitors key estates performance indicators and uses these to inform operational and curriculum planning.

3. What is a Governor and what do they do?

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3.2 Your membership of the Governing Body
3.3 Performance assessment, training and development
3.4 Roles on the Governing Body
3.5 Asking questions and making decisions
3.6 Probity and Standards in Public Life
3.7 Your liabilities as a governor

3.1 Introduction

The role of the governor is a demanding one, in addition to your corporate responsibilities, as a Governing Body member you will have individual responsibilities to observe the highest standards of integrity. Observance of the guidelines laid down in the documents in Appendix 1 should assist you to carry out your duties in line with good practice.

As a governor you are required, by the Instrument for your college, to uphold and abide by a code of conduct as a condition of appointment.

This chapter provides detail on your role and the way in which you should carry it out, the types of members on a Governing Body, performance assessment and your liabilities as a governor.

3.2 Your membership of the Governing Body

Governors are appointed for a fixed term of office of four years as specified in your minute of appointment (or for one year if you are a student member). Your membership will end on the specified date, but you may be eligible for reappointment for a further term, provided your performance has been deemed satisfactory during your first term and subject to some exclusions set in Schedule 1 of the Instrument of Government.

Governing Body Chairs and members are remunerated in line with the provisions of DfE circular FE 07/17 - Remuneration of Governing Body Chairs and Members. Governors can also claim for travel and subsistence for activities carried out while fulfilling duties. Governing bodies will have a schedule of allowances, which properly reflect the costs incurred. These should not exceed any rates which the Department may determine.

Governing Body members are appointed as individuals and should therefore act as such on the Governing Body. The model of governance in FE ensures that decisions are made on the basis of the experience and skills of stakeholders. While you will be classified as a particular type of governor, this classification is for the purposes of the constitution of the Governing Body. It does not mean that you have to represent the views of a particular group. Individuals are voting members in their own right and you should make decisions

based on the best interests of your college. Governing Body members cannot be bound in their speaking or voting by mandates given to them by other bodies or persons.

Each Governing Body will have a code of conduct which members are required to uphold and abide by as a condition of appointment. This includes adherence to the Standards in Public Life set out in section 3.6.

You are also subject to employment law and legislation on data protection (including GDPR), freedom of information, equal opportunities, race relations, fair employment and treatment, health and safety and Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

The Secretary to your Governing Body will provide you with copies of the college Instrument and Articles and Partnership Agreement on appointment. You should ensure that you also receive copies of or access to the following documents, specific to your college:

- most recent College Development Plan,
- most recent annual report and accounts,
- most recent financial forecast and current budget,
- key HR policies and procedures,
- college equality scheme,
- student disciplinary procedures,
- student pastoral care and college safeguarding arrangements, and
- college freedom of information and data protection policy documents

You should comply at all times with your college Instrument and Articles and with the rules and guidance relating to use of public funds and to conflicts of interest.

Your Governing Body will, at times, need to seek professional advice e.g. a legal opinion. If you are a member of a profession from which advice is sought, you should take care not to be put in the position of offering advice to the Governing Body. Similarly, while you should contribute to the debate in your role as a governor and contribute on the basis of your skills, you should seek to avoid any conflict of interest and not offer any professional opinion which may influence decisions on how to proceed. Formal professional opinion should be sought from the Governing Body's appointed professional advisers in the appropriate field.

During your period of Governing Body membership, you may resign at any time by giving notice in writing to the **Secretary to the Governing Body** (**not** the Principal/Chief Executive or the Chair). It is the responsibility of the Secretary to inform the relevant parties on the Governing Body and the Department of a resignation in writing (by letter or email), enclosing the notice of resignation. The membership of a governor who is the Principal/Chief Executive of the college or a staff or student member lapses when they cease to be the Principal/Chief Executive, a member of staff or a student at the college respectively, or at the date specified on their minute of appointment.

There may also be instances when you become disqualified from membership of a Governing Body. These are specified in Schedule 1 to the Instrument. You should familiarise yourself with this list and, if your circumstances change in a way that might render you ineligible to serve on the Governing Body, you must immediately inform the Secretary. The Instrument also defines the circumstances in which a Governing Body must inform the Department that a governor should be removed from office, for example, for poor attendance or a breach of the code of conduct. If the Department receives such a notification, it will inform the governor and they will have an opportunity to respond before any decision is reached.

3.3 Performance assessment, training and development

3.3.1 Performance assessment

As detailed in your terms and conditions of appointment, you should expect your performance to be appraised on an annual basis by the Chair of your Governing Body. You will be assessed based on the competence framework for Governing Body members, which sets out the knowledge and skills required of individual members of a Governing Body and governing bodies collectively. Details of the framework are provided in circular FE 05/12 Knowledge, Skills and Competences of Governing Body Members (see Appendix 1). Your performance will be discussed between you and the Chair, and you will both sign the assessment. The Department will receive a copy of your completed assessment.

For your appointment to continue for the remainder of your term or, where applicable, for you to be considered for re-appointment at the end of your term, your performance appraisal report must be satisfactory. An unsatisfactory appraisal report may lead to the consideration of disciplinary action, which could ultimately lead to termination of your appointment.

In the event that you apply for another public appointment, the Department will, on request, provide the appointing department with information relating to your performance as a Governing Body member and adherence to the principles of public life (see section 3.6).

Your individual assessment is part of an annual performance assessment process, details of which are set out in circular FE 06/12 Assessment of Chairs and Members of Governing Bodies (see Appendix 1). This process also includes an assessment of your Governing Body's overall performance, which takes the form of a questionnaire individual members are asked to complete on a non-attributable basis. The Department administers the process, and each Governing Body will be provided with an analysis summarising both its own Governing Body responses and responses across the sector. This information will be useful both to your Governing Body, as an assessment of its strengths and weaknesses,

and to the Department, as it provides a mechanism to assess the operation of each Governing Body.

As part of the Governing Body self-assessment, you will be asked to provide a view on the performance of your Chair. The collective views of your Governing Body will form part of the Chair's annual assessment. The Chair's assessment will also consist of a self-assessment and an assessment by the Department.

Although the Department administers this annual process, the Governing Body should also develop a basis for the regular monitoring of its own performance in carrying out its responsibilities. This should include identification and recording of any areas where development or training for governors might be helpful.

The Governing Body should have formal procedures in place for regular appraisal of the Principal/Chief Executive based on areas of performance and associated indicators determined by the Governing Body.

3.3.2 Training and development

As a new governor, you will be invited to attend governance training arranged by the Department. Attendance at this training is mandatory for all new governors in line with your terms of appointment. You will also receive induction and other necessary training and development support at your specific college. This should include a briefing on the college, its structure, and its allocation of managerial roles and responsibilities. Refresher training is offered for members in their second term of appointment. For those of you who become members of your college audit committee, the Department will provide a dedicated training session.

Beyond this, governors themselves and the Governing Body as a whole are responsible for ensuring that other training and development needs are met.

3.4 Roles on the Governing Body

There are different ways in which individuals can become members of a Governing Body, and, once appointed, there are different roles which governors can perform. This section provides detail on the different roles and types of member.

3.4.1 The Chair

The Chair is the most important role on the Governing Body. They are appointed by the Department's Minister following a public competition. The Chair has a particular responsibility for providing effective strategic leadership to the Governing Body and for ensuring it fulfils its role effectively.

The role includes:

- providing leadership to the Governing Body, ensuring that individual governors work as a cohesive team;
- enabling all governors to make a full contribution to the affairs of the Governing Body, including advising new members on their role and responsibilities;
- leading in determining the mission of the college, the establishment and maintenance of its general character and its strategic direction, aligned with Executive/Ministerial strategic priorities;
- ensuring that the Governing Body has sufficient support and information to discharge its functions;
- ensuring that the Governing Body takes due account of all statutory regulations, governance
- of practice and other requirements and that the college delivers against the strategy and policy for FE in Northern Ireland;
- representing the interests of the college at meetings with the Minister, senior officials and the general public;
- ensuring effective oversight of college's management of performance, financial controls and staff, and encouraging high standards of propriety and promoting efficient and effective use of staff and other resources throughout the college;
- working collaboratively with all other colleges to develop a cohesive FE sector.

The Department usually communicates with the Governing Body through the Chair and the Secretary. Nevertheless, an individual member may approach the Department on any matter which they believe raises important issues relating to their duties as a member. It is an implicit expectation that the Governing Body will authorise the Chair to act on its behalf between meetings and to report items of Chair's action to the Governing Body at its regular meetings, particularly action agreed with the Principal/Chief Executive on matters delegated by the Governing Body.

3.4.2 The Principal/Chief Executive

The Principal/Chief Executive is also the Accounting Officer of the college. They are accountable to the Governing Body and are also accountable, through the Director of FE, to the Permanent Secretary of the Department for all aspects of the college's expenditure of public funds. They should have due regard for all legislative requirements placed upon the college to ensure fair and equal treatment of staff and students. Their responsibilities include:

- making proposals to the Governing Body about the educational nature and mission of the college and for ensuring the decisions of the Governing Body in this and all other regards are implemented;
- providing the Governing Body with adequate information on all of the college's affairs to enable it to comply fully with requirements of its role;
- the day-to-day organisation, direction and management of the college and leadership of the staff;

- the preparation of proposed annual estimates of income and expenditure, for consideration and approval by the Governing Body, and for the overall management of the budget and other resources within the estimates approved by the Governing Body;
- the maintenance of proper accounts and records in line with the requirement of statutory authorities and the Order, and the provision of such data as may be required to the Governing Body, the Department or other appropriate statutory body;
- the quality of teaching and performance of the functions of the college especially with regard to academic provision;
- the arrangements for the admission, assessment and examination of students;
- the development of the curriculum and programmes of staff development;
- the implementation of the policies for the appointment, development, promotion, appraisal, discipline, conduct and grievances of staff;
- the maintenance of student discipline and the suspension and/or expulsion of students within the framework set by the Governing Body; and
- such other duties as may be delegated by the Governing Body, subject to certain exclusions.

A full list can be found in the Articles, with responsibilities of the Principal/Chief Executive as college Accounting Officer detailed in section 2.9.

It should be noted that the Principal/Chief Executive also has a governance role like any other governor.

Further information on the relationship between the Principal/Chief Executive and the Governing Body can be found in section 2.9.

Along with the Chair, the Principal/Chief Executive is the visible, public face of the college. It is therefore essential that they fulfil their duties in a way which inspires the confidence and trust of the staff and students. The Principal/Chief Executive also has a public role, representing the college to the outside world. The Governing Body will be concerned with ensuring, as far as possible, that all such activities present the college in a positive light, and one which is consistent with the mission, aims and objectives set by the Governing Body.

3.4.3 The student member

The student member is elected by the student population of the college however they are not on the Governing Body to represent the views of the student body. Their role is to bring the learner perspective to the decision making process in the college. Like any other governor, they must make decisions based on the best interests of the college.

3.4.4 The staff members

The staff members are elected by the staff of the college. The 1997 Order makes provision for either one or two staff governors. As with the student member, these elections are in accordance with the rules made by the Governing Body. The staff members are in the same position as the student member in respect of their role on the Governing Body; they should bring the perspective of staff to the decision making process but, their role is not to represent staff on the Governing Body.

3.4.5 Chairs of committees

Each committee of the Governing Body will be chaired by a governor elected from the committee's membership. Some committees have restrictions about who can serve as chair (Section 2.8 contains further information). The Principal/Chief Executive, staff and student members cannot chair any committee. Committee chairs are responsible for making sure that committee business is conducted properly and that members are able to ask questions and receive appropriate answers. They also report on the work of each committee to the Governing Body and obtain ratification of the committee's decisions.

3.4.6 The Secretary

The Secretary to the Governing Body is responsible for organising the proper conduct of the business of the Governing Body. The Secretary is an employee of the college but works directly for the Governing Body and shall not hold any other position in the college. They are not a member of the Governing Body.

Specific duties of the Secretary include:

- organising meetings;
- preparing agenda and papers;
- taking minutes of meetings;
- advising the Chair on procedures;
- ensuring that the decisions of the Governing Body are conveyed to those with a responsibility to implement them (though any communication with staff of the college must be via the Principal/Chief Executive);
- liaising with the Department, as required. Examples include responding to requests for information and, where necessary, communicating Governing Body decisions e.g. in relation to selection of staff, student and co-opted members.

The Secretary must be familiar with the documents in Appendix 1 to be able to carry out their duties. If you require any of these documents, or have any issues or queries regarding your Governing Body or its work, you should speak with your Secretary.

3.5 Asking questions and making decisions

Constructive challenge by the Governing Body and individual Governing Body members benefits everyone. Being inquisitive, and therefore better informed, is a basic tenet which you must bring to your role. You should make sure you are well prepared for each meeting by carefully reading minutes of previous meetings, papers supplied by the Secretary and any other correspondence, and giving thorough consideration to executive proposals. The strength of the Governing Body is dependent on the quality and variety of the contributions made by you and your fellow governors. These contributions should not be limited to formal meetings, but should be extended to working groups and committees looking at particular issues on behalf of the Governing Body. Much of the more detailed work of the Governing Body is carried out at committee level and you are encouraged to join committees.

Your decisions on all subjects must be taken on merit and with the overall interests of the college in mind, and not on the basis of the interests of any particular group. You should only agree to a particular course of action if you are satisfied that it is in the best interests of the college and its students. Where necessary you are encouraged to seek written assurance in matters where you are unconvinced or dissatisfied with the information/ answers being provided to the Governing Body.

Whilst Governing Body members should primarily engage their Chair over concerns they may have regarding issues which have significant financial or reputational impact for the College and/or the Economy Minister, responsible Governing Body members should also consider alerting the Department of these concerns if they consider they are not being adequately addressed by either the Governing Body or the college management team.

While you may find yourself asking questions which appear overly simplistic, it is often answers to simple questions which are the most informative. You should be wary of agreeing with a decision simply because it reflects the majority opinion within the Governing Body. If you are not convinced that all realistic alternative courses of action have been fully considered and that the decision is supported by relevant evidence, you should not be afraid to raise it at the meeting. The best boards have members who are willing to challenge one another and are able to do so within a constructive environment which encourages discussion. You should be aware that once a decision has been made, you are bound by the collective decision of the Governing Body, even if you disagree with that decision.

3.6 Probity and Standards in Public Life

As a governor, you have a responsibility to observe the highest standards of integrity, at both a corporate and personal level, as is appropriate to a publicly funded position. You should refer to the terms and conditions of appointment provided with your minute of appointment and be familiar with these requirements. Supplementary to this, everyone in

public life must adhere to the ethical standards established by the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the seven principles of public life. These are:

- **Selflessness -** Holders of public office should act solely in terms of the public interest.
- **Integrity -** Holders of public office must avoid placing themselves under any obligation to people or organisations that might try inappropriately to influence them in their work. They should not act or take decisions in order to gain financial or other material benefits for themselves, their family, or their friends. They must declare and resolve any interests and relationships.
- **Objectivity -** Holders of public office must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.
- **Accountability -** Holders of public office are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.
- **Openness -** Holders of public office should act and take decisions in an open and transparent manner. Information should not be withheld from the public unless there are clear and lawful reasons for so doing.
- **Honesty -** Holders of public office should be truthful.
- **Leadership -** Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and be willing to challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.

Annex 5 of the Partnership Agreement for your college sets out the approach to concerns/complaints raised in respect of Governing Body members, for example by staff.

As a governor, you occupy a high profile position in the college and you may, from time to time, be offered gifts or hospitality by other people or organisations. You should not receive benefits of any kind from individuals or organisations which might reasonably be seen to compromise your personal judgement or have the potential to embarrass the college. You may find it helpful to discuss with the Chair or the Secretary to determine whether acceptance would be in any way inappropriate.

Any gifts or hospitality you do accept or reject should be recorded in the gifts and hospitality register(s). The Governing Body should ensure there is an up-to-date policy on gifts and hospitality in place.

Every college is required by the Instrument to maintain a register of members' interests that records any material interests each governor holds which could be perceived to have a bearing on any decisions coming before the Governing Body. Every member is required to enter all business interests held, their membership of any other public bodies, any positions held that might give rise to a perceived conflict of interest, the names of any relatives who work at the college and a declaration of any significant political activity undertaken in the five years prior to appointment.

It is the responsibility of each governor to ensure that their entry in the register is kept up to date. An opportunity to update entries in the register should form part of the agenda of each full Governing Body meeting.

During your time on the Governing Body, it is likely that you will face some kind of conflict of interest. If any issue coming before the Governing Body has, or could be perceived to have, the potential to conflict with your stated interests held in the register, you should declare the interest and withdraw from discussion of the issue. There may be instances where the potential conflict of interest is not clear cut; on these occasions you should discuss the issues with your Chair in advance of the meeting. If the potential conflict is not felt to be prejudicial to the issue up for discussion, you need not withdraw. You should, however, withdraw from the discussion of any issues where there is a possible personal financial benefit or any financial benefit to your friends or relatives.

The Principal/Chief Executive, staff and student members must also withdraw from discussions when the issue concerns their positions as a Principal/Chief Executive, member of staff or student. Schedule 4 to the Instrument sets out the conditions under which these members are required to withdraw.

3.7 Your liabilities as a governor

The law relating to the personal liability of board members is complex and its interpretation is ultimately a matter for the courts.

As long as a member has acted honestly and in good faith, they are indemnified by the Department against individual civil liability in the course of carrying out their responsibilities for the Governing Body. This indemnity does not protect a member who acts recklessly or in bad faith.

APPENDIX 1 What else do I need to know and read

This appendix provides details of documents that you should have access to and be familiar with. This Guide should be viewed as complementing them, not as a substitute. Your Governing Body Secretary will be able to provide you with copies.

The Further Education (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 provides the statutory basis for FE in Northern Ireland. It establishes the role and powers of the Department and the Governing Body. In terms of governance, all other documents are subordinate to the Order and subject to its provisions.

Each college has an Instrument of Government and Articles of Government made under the powers of the Order. The Instrument of Government sets out the composition of the Governing Body and its Committees, including arrangements for the appointment of members. The Articles of Government govern the committee structure, the proceedings, and the duties of the Governing Body. They also determine the matters which are reserved to the Governing Body and those which can be delegated to the Principal/Chief Executive. Subject to the provisions of the Articles, each Governing Body has the power to make **Standing Orders**. These may be procedural rules relating to the conduct of Governing Body business. They are internal to the college and are not subject to approval by the Department. They must however be fully compliant with the Articles and Instrument and take account of all other regulatory documents.

The financial administration of each College is conducted in accordance with the Order and also the PA. The PA sets out the College's partnership arrangements with the Department and the overall governance framework within which the College operates. It covers matters such as the terms and conditions under which the Department makes funding available to colleges and helps to ensure that the funds made available for FE are used effectively and efficiently, and only used for the purpose for which they have been allocated. It outlines the respective responsibilities of the Department and the college, especially with regard to the planning, budgeting and control of resources. It reflects the requirements of *Managing Public Money NI*. The Department issues **Accounts Direction** in the form of a circular, setting out the requirements for colleges to prepare Annual Report and Financial Statements. This is updated and issued every year. Further to this, DoF's Audit and Risk Assurance Committee Handbook (NI) provides those responsible for the establishment and appointing audit committees, and members of audit committees, with support in their respective roles.

As outlined at section 3.3.1, a key part of the Department's wider scrutiny of the functionality and performance of its arm's length bodies are the sector arrangements for performance assessment. Circular Assessment of Chairs and Members of Governing Bodies (FE06/12) outlines the method of assessment for both Chairs and members of governing bodies. The assessment process has been designed with reference to

standard practices in use elsewhere in the public sector and adapted as necessary to remain consistent with the competence framework for recruitment and selection of members of governing bodies Knowledge, Skills and Competences of Governing Body Members (FE05/12). This sets out the knowledge, skills and competences required of individual members and governing bodies collectively.

In terms of the high level context in which the Department and colleges operate, the Minister's Economic Vision, which was set out in 2024, defines four key objectives:

- increasing the proportion of working age people in Good Jobs,
- promotion of Regional Balance,
- raise Productivity and
- reduce carbon emissions.

The FE sector has a critical role in supporting the achievement of this Vision. It will play a key role, contributing to all four objectives, with an emphasis on supporting the promotion of Regional Balance. The sector is a key delivery mechanism in both DfE's and the Executive's approach to growing the economy and supporting social inclusion. FE helps underpin the creation of a successful regional economy by strengthening the skills profile of Northern Ireland and linking individuals to work through the successful delivery of all skills levels, including significant support towards social inclusion and creating opportunity. As well as supporting workforce development and deprived communities, FE also directly supports businesses, including help with innovation and growth, which in turn increases regional competitiveness. The sector's collaborative offering aligns strongly to economic priorities at regional and sub-regional levels.

The colleges, provide skills and opportunities that are essential to building a modern economy and creating a stronger, more inclusive society. The aim for FE in Northern Ireland is to develop a world class FE sector, financially efficient and with strong governance; a sector with state of the art facilities; a sector which is collaborative, and responsive both to learner and employer needs; a sector which plays a vital role in delivering skills for the economy, as well as high quality skills and support services for learners/employers aligned to economic priorities; and which supports social inclusion.

In February 2025, the Executive agreed a Programme for Government 2024-2027 'Our Plan: Doing What Matters Most'. It outlines Executive priorities for making a real difference to the lives of people in Northern Ireland, focussing on three core areas:

1. Doing What Matters Most Today, improving the wellbeing of everyone living and working in Northern Ireland,
2. Building New Foundations, improving infrastructure in Northern Ireland,
3. Shaping a Better Tomorrow, laying the foundations needed for longer term improvements.

One of the priorities, under Doing What Matters Most Today, is to grow a Globally Competitive and Sustainable Economy. This encompasses the objectives of Productivity, Good Jobs, Decarbonisation and Regional Balance.

APPENDIX 2 USEFUL ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ALB	Arm's Length Body
AO	Accounting Officer
ASF	Additional Support Fund
BC	Business Case
BIP	Business, Industry & Professional (Board of Governors)
BMC	Belfast Metropolitan College
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council
CAG/C&AG	Comptroller and Auditor General
CAL	Centre for Applied Learning
CAU	Central Appointments Unit (Executive Office)
CBI	Confederation of British Industry
CCEA (NI)	Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment
CDP	College Development Plan
CEF	College Employers' Forum
CIP	College Improvement Plan
CIPFA	Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy
CITB	Construction Industry Training Board
COO	Chief Operating Officer
COPE	Centre of Procurement Excellence
CPANI/OCPANI	(Office of) Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland
CPC	Crescent Purchasing Consortium
CPD	Construction and Procurement Delivery
CR	Cost Recovery
CSR	Comprehensive Spending Review
CWAP	Conversation with a purpose
DAC	Direct Award Contract
DAO	Dear Accounting Officer
DEL	Departmental Expenditure Limit
DoF	Department of Finance
DfC	Department for Communities
DfE	Department for the Economy
DNC	Directors' Negotiating Committee
DPA	Data Protection Act 2018
DSO	Departmental Solicitors Office
EA	Economic Appraisal
EA	Education Authority
EC	European Commission
EF	Entitlement Framework

EIAG	(Careers) Education, Information, Advice and Guidance (Strategy)
EMA	Education Maintenance Allowance
EO	Executive Office
EQIA	Equality Impact Assessment
ES	Essential Skills
ESA	Employment and Support Allowance
ESF	European Social Fund
ESP	Employer Support Programme
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
F&GP	Finance and General Purposes
FAST	Financial Audit and Support Team
FCR	Full Cost Recovery
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FE	Further Education
FECGA	Further Education Corporate Governance and Accountability
FELS	Further Education Leavers Survey
FEMS	Further Education Means Success (Publication)
FfA	Framework for Achievement
FHEQ	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications
FM	Financial Memorandum
FOI	Freedom of Information
FReM	Financial Reporting Memorandum
FRS	Financial Reporting Standard
FUI	Follow Up Inspection
GAAP	Generally Accepted Accounting Principles
GANI	Government Accounting NI
GB	Governing Body
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
GIAS	Government Internal Audit Standards
GQs	General Qualifications
GT & EP	Government Training & Employment Programmes
GTCNI	General Teaching Council in Northern Ireland
HCA	Historical Cost Adjustment
HE	Higher Education
HIA	Heads of Internal Audit
HOCS/HoCS	Head of Civil Service (Northern Ireland)
HR	Human Resources
HSENI	Health and Safety Executive NI
IA	Independent Assessor (allocated by CPANI)

IAS	Internal Audit Services
I & E	Income and Expenditure
ICO	Information Commissioner's Office
IT/ICT	Information Technology/Information and Communications Technology
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions
IFRS	International Financial Reporting Standards
ILP	Individual Learning Plan
ILT	Information and Learning Technology
IQRS	Improving Quality: Raising Standards
ISLA	Individualised Student Learning Agreement
JANET	Joint Academic Network
JISC	Joint Information Systems Committee
KS	Key Skills
KT	Knowledge Transfer
LAE	Learner Access and Agreement
LoO/LOO	Letter of Offer
LNC	Lecturers' Negotiating Committee
LPS	Land and Property Services
LRA	Labour Relations Agency
LRS	Learning Records Service
MaSN	Maximum Student Number
MIS	Management Information Systems
MOA	Mode of Attendance
MoU/MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPMNI	Managing Public Money NI
NAO	National Audit Office
NDAQ	National Database of Accredited Qualifications
NDPB	Non-Departmental Public Body
NEETs	Not in Employment, Education or Training
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
NIA	Northern Ireland Assembly
NIAO	Northern Ireland Audit Office
NICIS	Northern Ireland College Information System
NICS	Northern Ireland Civil Service
NIFON	Northern Ireland Finance Officers' Network
NIGEAE	Northern Ireland Guide to Expenditure Appraisal and Evaluation
NIMDM	Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure
NIO	Northern Ireland Office
NIPON	Northern Ireland Procurement Officers' Network

NIPSO	Northern Ireland Public Services Ombudsman
NI PPP	NI Public Procurement Policy
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
NPISH	Non-profit Institutions Serving Households
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRC	Northern Regional College
NUS-USI	National Union of Students-Union of Students in Ireland
NVQs	National Vocational Qualifications
NWRC	North West Regional College
OBA	Outcomes Based Accountability
OBC	Outline Business Case
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills
OLC	Office of the Legislative Counsel
ONS	Office of National Statistics
PA	Partnership Agreement
P&CE	Principal/Chief Executive
PAC	Public Accounts Committee
PACE	Practical Approach to Career Exploration
PAU	Public Appointments Unit (DfE)
PfG	Programme for Government
PFI	Private Finance Initiative
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PLAQ	Prescribed List of Approved Non NQF/QCF Qualification – owned by DfE
PLR	Personal Learning Record
PO	Purchase Order
PPE	Post-Project Evaluation
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PSA	Public Service Agreement
PSIAS	Public Sector Internal Audit Standards
QCA	Qualifications Curriculum Authority
QCF	Qualifications and Credit Framework
QIP	Quality Improvement Plan
QPA	Quality and Performance Adjustment
QUB	Queen's University, Belfast
RRQ	Register of Regulated Qualifications
RTTCWG	Report to Those Charged With Governance (Annual Report/Accounts)
SAR	Subject Access Request

SENDO	Special Educational Needs and Disability (NI) Order 2005
SERC	South Eastern Regional College
SFC	Scottish Funding Council
SIBNI	Strategic Investment Board Northern Ireland
SJ4	SuperJANET4
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SLDD	Special Learning Difficulties and/or Disabilities
SME(s)	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
SMT	Senior Management Team
SOA	Schedule of Accommodation
SORP	Statement of Recommended Practice
SPICE	Specialist Provision for Industry using College Expertise
SPUR	Student Powered Unit of Resource
SR	Spending Review
SRC	Southern Regional College
SSAP	Statement of Standard Accounting Practice
SSC	Sector Skills Council
SSWG	Shared Services Working Group
STA	Single Tender Action
STATA	Statistical Software Package
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths
STEAM	Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Maths
StS	Systems Technology Services
StW	Steps to Work
SuperJANET	Super Joint Academic Network
SUSE	Step up to Sustainable Employment
SWC	South West College
T&S	Travel and subsistence
TEO	The Executive Office
TfS	Training for Success
TLD	Technology in Learning Delivery
TQS	Training Quality Standard
UCU	University and College Union
UKCES	UK Commission for Employment and Skills
ULN/ULR	Unique Learner Number/Record
USEL	Ulster Supported Employment Limited
UU	Ulster University
UUC	Ulster University at Coleraine
UUJ	Ulster University at Jordanstown
UUM	Ulster University Magee
VEP	Vocational Enhancement Programme

VET	Vocational Education and Training
VLE	Virtual Learning Environment
VQs	Vocational Qualifications
VQRP	Vocational Qualifications Reform Programme
VRQs	Vocationally-Related Qualifications
WBL	Work based learning
WIP	Work in Progress
WP	Widening Participation

APPENDIX 3

FACT SHEET 1: MAXIMUM STUDENT NUMBERS

The number of full-time undergraduate places at each higher education provider institution in Northern Ireland is subject to a cap as a means of controlling the cost to government of higher education (HE).

The cap was introduced in 1994 and is known as the Maximum Student Number (MaSN). It was introduced to constrain escalating public expenditure on demand led student support costs.

The MaSN does not apply to part-time undergraduates, postgraduates (with the exception of a Post Graduate Certificate in Education and some social work places) or to students from outside the European Union or from the rest of the UK.

Students who have been prescribed in the Student Fees (Qualifying Courses and Persons) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007, as recently amended, who qualify for the lower 'home' tuition fee rate will continue to fall within the Department's MaSN cap. Students no longer eligible for the lower 'home' tuition fee charges will not be counted within the MaSN cap. Eligibility for 'home' tuition fee charges for courses in Northern Ireland starting in academic year 2021/22 has been removed for EU, other EEA and Swiss nationals with the following exceptions:

- EU, other EEA and Swiss national students with 'protected rights' under the Withdrawal agreements with 'pre-settled' or 'settled' status under the EU Settlement Scheme;
- RoI students (who are not required to apply under the EU Settlement Scheme under Common Travel Area arrangements); and
- certain 'niche' categories of students

Full-time HE in FE places are also subject to a MaSN cap. This is allocated by the Department on an annual basis following receipt of bids from each of the FE Colleges.

FACT SHEET 2: ANNUAL STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

