

**Minutes of the 72<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland. Thursday 9 July 2020 at 10.30am – meeting conducted via Zoom**

**Present:** Brendan Morgan (Chair), Raymond Beggs (RB), John Kelly (JK), Shaunagh Lambe (SL), Lisa Magennis (LM), Siobhan McElhinney (SM), Julian Morgan (JM), Paul O’Doherty (PO’D), Susan Parlour (SP), Keith Smith (KS), John Unsworth (JU), Gordon White (GW), John Wilkinson (JW), Mary-Lou Winchborne (MLW). Maria Mullally (MM), David Baxter (DB) (joined meeting at 12.23pm).

**In attendance:** Sam Gallaher (CEO), Gerry Devlin (GD), Majella Matthews (MM), Alan Boyd (DE), Elizabeth Lorimer (Notetaker).

**Apologies:** Aine Andrews, Dr David Joseph Baxter, Geri Cameron, Martin Cromie, Ciara Duffy, Dr Graham Gault, Dr Martin Hagan, Fiona Kane, Emma Loughridge, Catherine McBride, Sonia McGowan, Maria Mullally, Catriona Mullan, Clíodhna Scott-Wills, Maria Thomasson, Shirley McKenna.

**1. Welcome, introductions and apologies**

The Chair welcomed Members to the meeting and Council agreed that quorate had been met.

AB explained that he was facilitating the meeting via Zoom and was present as a DE observer only, while the Chair would manage all other business.

The apologies were noted as detailed above.

Referring to an email complaint he had received, the Chair advised Council that he understood that a member of the public might join the meeting. The CEO explained that a member of the public had requested to sit in on the meeting. They had been asked to confirm login details, but no further response was received. AB confirmed that no one else had registered to join via Zoom other than those now present.

The Chair thanked everyone for attending and advised that the agenda was short because the longer agenda could not be facilitated in one Zoom meeting. As such, the Officers had agreed that there should be only four items for discussion. The Chair noted that ‘AOB’ and ‘Date of next meeting’ had been added to the agenda, which had not been agreed and advised Council that it could be covered if they decided to do so, otherwise the four substantive items which had been previously agreed would be discussed. The Chair commented that he was dissatisfied that these items had been added without the agreement.

The Chair explained that Standing Orders needed to be set aside for this meeting which meant that no previous minutes were to be included because the timeframe for the meeting was limited to 1pm. The CEO stated that ‘AOB’ and ‘Date of next meeting’ were merely standard items on any agenda, but that requests had been received for points of

<p>discussion under 'AOB', and it would be the Council's decision if these should be discussed or not.</p> <p>Council discussed whether items outside of the agenda should be discussed under 'AOB', with some concerns noted that Standing Orders had been set aside. The Chair advised that if time permitted, further items could be discussed under 'AOB' but explained that an alternative plan was in place to deal with other items which would need to be put to Council to decide upon (to be discussed later).</p>	
<p><b>2. Declarations of Interest</b></p> <p>No declarations of interest were declared.</p>	
<p><b>3. 2018/19 Annual Report &amp; Accounts &amp; RTTCWG Report (GTC-20-72-P01a-c)</b></p> <p>The Chief Executive referred to paper circulated to Members and advised that Accounts had been Audited (externally), had gone to ARAC Committee and were now being tabled for approval. The only issue arising was that the Chair felt unable to write a 'Forward' and authorise the Accounts because he was not in Office for the year 2018-2019. PO'D was willing to take on this task on behalf of Council.</p> <p>MM advised there was nothing further to add and the only further changes made had been the completion of the Audit, the update of Governance Statement to present, and only the 'Forward' needed to be written.</p> <p>The Chair suggested reference to "No Whistleblowing referred to GTCNI in 2018/2019" should be removed because issues of Whistleblowing had been discussed at October 2019 Council Meeting. The CEO explained that to his knowledge there were no Whistleblowing complaints received by GTCNI in the year 2018/2019 but there had been one in April 2019, which would fall into the 2019/2020 report, and as such the statement was accurate.</p> <p>The Chair advised that the issue had been alluded to within October 2019 Minutes and questioned if governance required to include the period up until the Report was signed off. The CEO advised the statement reflected the position in 2018/2019 when no matter had been submitted to Council. There had been correspondence received by DE which was being dealt with by them under their Whistleblowing Policy.</p> <p>The CEO advised he would remove that particular clause from the 2019/2020 report and include it in the 2018/2019 report instead. Council agreed to this course of action.</p> <p>PO'D asked for clarification regarding the position if he wrote the 'Forward'. He asked if the fact that the Chair had been a Whistleblower himself, would allow him to sign-off the Report and advised that the only alternative was that someone else from Council to authorise. He</p>	<p><u>GTC//72 A01</u></p>

<p>suggested that it would be appropriate for someone from the previous Council to sign off on the Report.</p> <p>The CEO advised of the need to check this as the accounts would be subsumed within DE's Accounts, and as such, he should check if DE were happy with the proposed approach. JU suggested that the best solution would be for the previous Vice Chair to complete the 'Forward' and proposed that the 2018/2019,</p> <p>Accounts were adopted, unless DE was not happy with that approach.</p> <p>On that basis, the Chair asked for a Proposer and a Secunder to this suggestion. Council unanimously took the rest of the Report as read and passed it.</p> <p><b>Proposed</b> John Unsworth <b>Seconded</b> Gordon White</p> <p><i>AB went offline at 11.05am due to a fire alarm at his offices.</i></p> <p>The Chief Executive asked if Council, while accepting the Annual Report and Accounts, could also accept the RTTCWG Report fr and it was duly proposed and seconded as below.</p> <p><b>Proposed</b> Mary-Lou Winchborne <b>Seconded</b> John Wilkinson</p>	<p><u>GTC/72/A02</u></p>
<p><b>4. Governance Framework (GTC-20-72-P02a-c)</b></p> <p>The Chair advised that the Governance Framework formed the constitution of the organisation and included Standing Orders and Memorandums of how the organisation functioned. The Council should be responsible for recording changes in the Framework. The Registrar had re-written the Framework and it was tabled for Council's approval to move to the new document. The Chair produced a paper (P02-c) which listed all the changes in the Standing Orders along with notes or issues the Chair believed needed to be reviewed. The Chair asked Council if there were any issues with this approach.</p> <p>The CEO reminded Members that the rationale for change came from consultation with previous Chair on review of operation of the Council. The framework was for the Council to adopt and decide what the Governance Framework should be, but these changes were based on the experience of the previous Chair.</p> <p>RB voiced concerns about changing the Governance Framework without the approval of the previous Council and stated he was not aware there had been any issues or that the previous Chair was dissatisfied. RB was surprised that the current Council were not made aware of issues and that Council should have made changes if required, especially when Council had not proposed or requested that changes were needed.</p>	

<p>The CEO advised this was a 'living' document and was put forward from the old Council to the new Council and changes had been suggested since the new Council's induction. The proposals were reasonable and some Members had commented and made further suggestions. It was a decision for Council if they wished to keep to the old version, but Council has had some months to consider this and it was discussed at the March Council meeting.</p> <p>JU commented that in his experience it was common practice to review Governance Framework documents and pointed out that, 1) What had happened in the previous Council gave a requirement for review of the Framework, and 2) This document had been visible to the new Council for a while. JU thanked the Chair for highlighting the changes but asked if any external advice had been sought from, for example, Legal or DE, regarding the wording of the document to assist with making the language more professional. Until it was reviewed by an expert, he would not be happy to approve the re-draft at present.</p> <p>MLW agreed that the Framework needed to be reviewed and said that, having been a Member of the previous Council, she supported a review at a professional level.</p> <p><i>AB returned to the meeting at 11.20am.</i></p> <p>Council Members agreed that only the changes highlighted in Sections 2 and 3 in the document needed to be reviewed and it was suggested that DE would be well placed to review it, as sponsors of GTCNI, which would not incur any costs. It was agreed that other sections could be amended by Council with the assistance of DE and ToRs should be agreed by each Committee.</p> <p>The CEO advised the document had been circulated to DE and Internal Audit, but not DSO.</p> <p>The Chair asked for a proposer and seconder to the decision that the original Framework document be sent to the Governance Team in DE for review along with suggested revisions and summary document detailing changes.</p> <p><b>Proposed</b> John Unsworth  <b>Seconded</b> Mary-Lou Winchborne</p> <p>The CEO advised he would ask the Governance Team how long this was likely to take but indicated a timeframe of three months, for review at next Council meeting.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"><u>GTC/72/A03</u></p>
<p><b>5. GTCNI Corporate Plan (GTC-20-72-P10)</b></p> <p>The CEO outlined that, after the March Council meeting, the Corporate Plan was discussed and, after taking comments from Members, largely agreed upon with some small changes for 2020-2023. Work now</p>	

needed to be undertaken for 2019-2020 and the 'direction of travel' was that the organisation would use its Reserves over the period of the plan in delivering the objectives. Reserves were due to half within the next three years, with the main risk being potential increased liability on Pensions. Provisions was needed for Pensions and investment in a new registration system. The question was how to manage Reserves going forward. Delivering on the objectives of the Corporate Plan will be reflected in annual Business Plans. The Corporate Plan did not therefore have a granular level of detail and did reflect aspirational objectives.

While the Plan was welcomed; concerns were raised by Members regarding the capacity of staff to be able to deliver objectives, due to ongoing Covid 19 issues and gaps in staffing - which could have repercussions further down the line. Further concerns were voiced and it was suggested that the Plan was too aspirational and therefore difficult or impossible to achieve; that the objectives were undoable and that goals needed to be measurable, more specific, and tangible and be streamlined and timebound in order to be deliverable.

The CEO explained that while the Plan was predicated on certain assumptions, was realistic and should be deliverable. It was set at a higher level to provide strategic direction and framework that is presently lacking.

JW commented that while the Corporate Plan should be high level, it should be demonstrated how objectives would be achieved - with Business Plans, Council can hold Officers to account. He suggested there should be a GANT chart created to show how, who and when, etc. He added that this was a good starting point and that he was happy to approve the Plan on the basis that a GANT chart and Business Plans were prepared early.

The Chair summarised that, if a GANT chart and Business Plans were prepared and added to the report as an Addendum, that should satisfy the concerns that were voiced. The Chair suggested that the document be adopted and asked if anyone was opposed. There was no further opposition and Council voted to approve on the basis outlined.

The CEO advised that now that direction has been agreed, the Plan would be finalised for 2021, with a view to tabling at the next round of meetings.

**Proposed** Gordon White  
**Seconded** Mary-Lou Winchborne

*A comfort break was taken from 11.55am to 12.13pm.  
 Julian Morgan re-joined meeting at 12.13pm having lost connection.  
 John Wilkinson left the meeting at 12.13pm.*

GTC/72/A04

**6. Staffing Issues**

The Chair asked Council if they were content that this discussion took place without going “Into Committee”. The CEO advised he was happy to discuss because Members were aware of plans.

The CEO advised that in March meetings, Council approved a revised structure and a Business Case was now being finalised with the aim to have a settled structure in place by the end of the financial year. Communications would be sent to staff by the end of July with the Business Case due to be submitted at the beginning of August. Also, Job Descriptions were being finalised and focus was now on ‘Freedom of Information’ requests.

The Chief Executive advised that a further NIPSA survey had been received in May. This was discussed by the HR Committee who agreed that senior managers would prepare an exploratory report, and this was currently ongoing. In addition there were two Grievances, two Tribunals (although suspended due to Covid 19, with no indication of when suspension would be lifted) along with a matter relating to the Chief Executive.

The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee spoke about the NIPSA survey (which had been conducted within its membership); advising that the outcomes of the survey did give cause for concern. As a number of issues raised in the survey appeared inconsistent with what the HR Committee were being told the Committee had asked Members to further discuss and explore what was presented by NIPSA. This action had not been progressed as yet.

The Chair advised that the HR Committee had taken on board the concerns expressed by staff and came up with proposals to alleviate their issues. Staff felt inundated with papers regarding the Staff Handbook though it had been agreed to issue information in batches.

The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee apologised because he didn’t realise he was expected to provide an update on the HR Committee business, and a number of issues were now being highlighted.

The CEO confirmed that a letter had been issued to staff to reassure them that there was no risk to their jobs and to address their concerns over the Staff Handbook consultation.

The CEO confirmed that (as previously proposed) the HR Committee had agreed that the Chair of Council and Chair of the HR Committee would attend, as observers, the Joint Consultative Committee between NIPSA and GTCNI SMT. Their attendance however was not mandatory. This had been conveyed to NIPSA again and we are awaiting a response.

The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee confirmed that the issue was about consultation and the HR Committee had agreed that Chairs should attend but not be involved in voting.

RB asked that it be noted that considerable time had passed since Council were first notified of staffing issues in GTCNI, and a second report had now been received from NIPSA which showed no improvement. Council had a duty of care to staff and steps should have been taken before now. Action needed to be taken and Council could be held liable if they didn't act.

The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee agreed and advised that the Committee had reviewed the report and, when compared with feedback received from Senior Management, it didn't tally. Because of that, the Committee felt they needed to explore the findings further with colleagues to find out what was causing concern and they awaited feedback on this. He added that it was not appropriate for Council to manage this level of detail and actions have been taken at the HR Committee which are currently work in progress.

MM advised that she was a NIPSA member and had contributed to the survey, so had to declare a conflict of interest. Notwithstanding this fact, she advised she was happy to carry out the task that she and GD had been asked to do, but pointed out that she had an extremely heavy workload and would like the specifics of the questions that she needed to ask outlined. She was concerned because she was not an experienced or trained investigator, so planned to have a discussion only with staff, and was nervous that her method was not correct. The correspondence was about understanding the specifics of what she was being tasked to do and be a conduit back to Council. She added that staff were wary of not having anonymity and they felt very let down in that respect. MM asked that it be noted that even having to state this now was very nerve-wracking.

The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee advised he appreciated the concerns raised but was not entirely comfortable with this discussion. As the HR Committee had asked the CEO to investigate concerns, the Vice-Chair felt it was inappropriate for full Council to discuss this issue at any further length. It was sufficient to say that the HR Committee had noted and responded to staff concerns and the issue should be further discussed at HR Committee in August. On a positive note, requests had been addressed regarding training and there was progress on that.

*Keith Smith left the meeting at 12.50pm.*

The Chair asked if the consultation on the staff handbook (phase 1) would be completed by the end of July.

The CEO advised that staff had the information and it had also been sent to the regional NIPSA Representative and they were working to a date of mid-July. No feedback had been received. The Staff Handbook work has been broken into a phased consultation to make it more manageable. It was reasonable to close off by the end of July, allow time to consider and make any necessary changes with a view to sign-off at the next round of meetings.

<p>The Chair asked for further clarity on timelines regarding consultation on staffing structure.</p> <p>The CEO advised that consultation on staffing was due to begin at the end of July in conjunction with Headstogether. It had been agreed that the Business Case would go to DE by the end of the month.</p> <p>Some members expressed views on the merits of employing Headstogether, with opposing views being expressed on staff dissatisfaction, costs incurred, queries over professionalism and independence (how can they be impartial if they have a contract with the organisation?).</p> <p>The Vice-Chair of the HR Committee again raised the fact that he was uncomfortable with this discussion because it was not on the agenda to have a full discussion about HR Committee business. He also urged caution about discussing the merits of Headstogether, because they were in contract to GTCNI. He suggested that an HR Committee meeting should be arranged in the short term to further discuss these issues.</p> <p>RB proposed that the meeting be adjourned now, and a further meeting convened to finish this discussion and to cover the rest of the agenda.</p> <p>The CEO advised that next scheduled Council meeting was not until October and suggested that the Schedule of Meetings be reviewed. It was hoped (subject to Covid situation) that a face to face meeting could be arranged at the end of August/beginning of September to cover the business that was deferred at this meeting and then plan to have a further Council meeting before year end.</p> <p>Council agreed to this suggestion.</p> <p>The Chair thanked everyone for their participation and also AB and the CEO for organising and hosting the meeting.</p> <p><b>The meeting closed at 1.15pm.</b></p>	
<p><b>7. AOB</b> None.</p>	
<p><b>8. Date of next meeting – TBC</b></p>	
<p><b>Signed</b>..... <b>Dated</b> .....</p>	



## ACTIONS REGISTER

Action No.	Item	Details	Owner	Timescale	Status
GTC/72/A01	2018/19 Annual Report & Accounts & RTTCWG Report	CEO to remove Whistleblowing clause from the 2019/2020 report and include it in the 2018/2019 report instead.	SG	immediate	Open
GTC/72/A01	2018/19 Annual Report & Accounts & RTTCWG Report	The CEO advised of the need to check if these Accounts would be subsumed within DE's Accounts, and as such, there was a requirement to check if DE was happy with that approach.	SG	immediate	Open
GTC/72/A03	Governance Framework	The CEO advised to ask the Governance Team how long their review of the Governance Framework document would take.	SG	immediate	Open
GTC/72/A04	GTCNI Corporate Plan	Plan to be finalised for 2021, with a view to tabling at the next round of meetings.	SG	Aug/Sept	Open