



Candidate Information Booklet

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS TO THE GOVERNING BODIES OF NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE (NRC) SOUTH WEST COLLEGE (SWC) SOUTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE (SRC) SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE (SERC)

We are committed to an accessible and inclusive appointments process. Reasonable adjustments are available on request – please contact us if you require support at any stage.

Please email Public Appointments Unit (PAU) at: pau@economy-ni.gov.uk or telephone:

**028 9052 9461 (Jean Mageean)
(Textrelay: 18001 028 9052 9461)**

**028 9052 9212 (Neil Morrison)
(Textrelay: 18001 028 9052 9212)**

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS TO THE GOVERNING BODIES OF
Northern Regional College
South West College
Southern Regional College
South Eastern Regional College

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The Department for the Economy (DfE) and the FE Colleges are committed to the principles of public appointment based on merit with independent assessment, openness and transparency of process.

We are also committed to equality of opportunity and welcome application forms from all suitably qualified applicants irrespective of religious belief, gender, race, political opinion, age, disability, marital status, sexual orientation, or whether or not they have dependents.

DfE would especially welcome applications from females, people under 40, people with disabilities and those from a minority ethnic background as they are currently under-represented. Applications from candidates with a community, voluntary or rural background would also be particularly welcome.

A public appointment to a Board gives individuals from different backgrounds and with specific skills and experience a chance to help make decisions that affect all our lives. Board appointments are a great opportunity to give something back to the community, whilst developing your own skills.

We are operating a Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS) in this competition for applicants with a disability. Applicants who apply under the GIS who meet the eligibility requirement and achieve the minimum score of 3 in each essential criterion at the sift stage will automatically be offered an interview. Their application will not be subjected to any shortlisting which may take place.

MINISTERIAL FOREWORD

Thank you for your interest in the position in becoming the Governing Body Chair of one of our Further Education Colleges.

Our Further Education Colleges are at the very heart of local communities, supporting learners, employers and communities while underpinning local economic growth.

Colleges are critical to delivering a regionally balanced economy, equipping people with the skills needed to access opportunity and meet employer demand. As Chair of the Governing Body you will provide strategic leadership, act as a key link with the Department, and help ensure that my priorities are reflected in college plans, performance and sectoral development.

Collaborative partnerships across the Further Education sector and with other partners will be an important ingredient for future success.

As the Further Education sector continues to evolve and deliver ambitious reform and transformation, strong and effective leadership will be essential to ensuring colleges continue to meet the needs of learners, employers and the wider economy.

I have visited many college campuses since becoming the Economy Minister and have had the opportunity to meet with Governing Body Chairs to discuss my priorities and hear about what the colleges are doing to take them forward. I value greatly the work they do in supporting learners, businesses and local communities.

The role of a Governing Body Chair is a vital leadership role and an exciting opportunity to shape the strategic direction of a college, support good governance and positively impact the lives of learners, businesses and communities.

I wholeheartedly encourage anyone who is interested in making a vital contribution to consider applying.

DR CAOIMHE ARCHIBALD MLA
Minister for the Economy

SECTION ONE

Introduction

The Department for the Economy (DfE) is seeking to appoint Governing Body Chairs to:

- Northern Regional College (NRC)
- South West College (SWC)
- Southern Regional College (SRC)
- South Eastern Regional College (SERC)

A Regulated Appointment

These appointments will be made in accordance with the Code of Practice issued by the Commissioner for Public Appointments for Northern Ireland (CPANI). Appointments are made on merit following a fair, open, and transparent process subject to independent scrutiny. The final appointment decision rests with the DfE Minister or, in the absence of a Minister, the Department's Permanent Secretary.

Further information is available from CPANI at:

<https://www.publicappointmentsni.org/>

The Further Education Sector

Northern Ireland's six regional Further Education (FE) Colleges provide professional, technical and academic education and training for learners of all ages. The sector plays a dual role:

- supporting economic growth through the development of skills and workforce capability; and
- promoting social inclusion by providing opportunities for people to develop skills, access education and enter employment.

All six colleges are classified as Non-Departmental Public Bodies (NDPBs) operating at arm's length from DfE. They have their own governing bodies, employ their own staff, manage allocated budgets and publish their own business plans, annual reports and accounts. Colleges are expected to contribute to Executive and Departmental priorities, including the Programme for Government and the Minister's Economic Vision.

Colleges involved in this competition.

College	Campuses	Students (2024/25)	Staff FTE
NRC	Ballymena, Coleraine, Magherafelt, Newtownabbey	8,275	539
SWC	Cookstown, Dungannon, Enniskillen, Omagh	14,270	577

SRC	Armagh, Banbridge, Lurgan, Newry, Portadown	11,695	652
SERC	Bangor, Downpatrick, Lisburn, Newcastle, Ballynahinch, Holywood, Newtownards	11,315	707

Further information can be found at:

- NRC: www.nrc.ac.uk
- SWC: www.swc.ac.uk
- SRC: www.src.ac.uk
- SERC: www.serc.ac.uk

For 2026/27, the colleges are operating on contingency allocations pending Executive agreement of the Budget. Current allocations are:

- NRC: £31.7 million
- SWC: £32.8 million
- SRC: £33.7 million
- SERC: £44.5 million

The total contingency allocation for the Further Education sector is £224.1 million.

Strategic context

The DfE Minister's Economic Vision identifies four key priorities:

- Increasing the proportion of working-age people in Good Jobs;
- Promoting Regional Balance;
- Raising Productivity; and
- Reducing Carbon Emissions.

These priorities align closely with the Programme for Government 2024-27 and place skills, employability and economic development at the centre of public policy.

FE colleges are critical delivery partners in achieving these objectives. They support individuals, employers and communities through the provision of education, training, workforce development and innovation support. The sector contributes directly to economic growth, productivity, social inclusion and regional prosperity.

The ambition is to develop a world-class FE sector that is financially sustainable, well-governed, collaborative, responsive to learner and employer needs, and capable of delivering high-quality skills provision aligned to Northern Ireland's economic priorities.

Key Challenges and Opportunities

FE colleges face a number of significant strategic challenges and opportunities, including:

- Strengthening collaboration across the FE sector to maximise impact and efficiency;
- Responding to changing learner, employer and demographic needs;
- Maintaining a strong and distinctive FE offer within an evolving skills landscape;
- Delivering high-quality outcomes within a challenging financial environment;
- Supporting effective industrial relations and sector-wide collective bargaining arrangements; and
- Ensuring colleges continue to play a leading role in delivering skills and supporting economic growth.

Strong leadership from Governing Body Chairs will be essential in helping colleges respond to these challenges while maintaining effective governance and financial stewardship.

FE Fit for the Future

In April 2026, the Economy Minister launched the FE Fit for the Future Programme to help ensure the Further Education sector remains fit for the future, for people, communities and economic prosperity.

The programme is focused on four key areas:

- Curriculum;
- Funding;
- Performance; and
- Enhanced collaboration.

Governing Body Chairs will play an important role in supporting and overseeing the implementation of this transformation both within their college and across the wider FE sector.

SECTION TWO

Role Profile

The Chair of the GB of an FE college has particular responsibility for providing effective strategic leadership for their college which aligns with the strategic direction of the Minister, as well as ensuring that the GB works effectively.

The GB is the corporate board of an FE college and is required under the FE (NI) Order 1997:

- To ensure the efficient and effective management of that college; and
- To ensure the provision of suitable and efficient FE to students at the college having regard to the needs of industry, commerce and the

community and, also, existing educational provision within the local area.

Like all corporate boards, the NRC, SWC, SRC and SERC GBs must operate effective governance systems and act in accordance with the highest standards of propriety. The GB's responsibility for the efficient and effective management of the college includes its financial performance and the quality of skills provision. It must ensure the college is managed with probity and integrity and has a responsibility for ensuring that the professional, technical and academic college programmes reflect its strategic direction and mission, as well as meeting the priorities set by the Department. In guiding the strategic direction of the college, the GB provides and exercises both a support and challenge function in respect of the Principal/Chief Executive and college senior management.

In accordance with Schedule 3 of the FE (NI) Order 1997, each college GB shall consist of not less than 12 nor more than 18 Members, of whom not less than one half are appointed by the Economy Minister through the public appointments process (including the Chair). Where a GB has full membership, there are 12 publicly appointed Members (including the Chair), with the remaining Members being ex-officio (the college Principal/Chief Executive, two staff representatives, a student representative and up to two Members who may be co-opted by the GB to bring added expertise and experience not considered adequately covered by other Members).

Individual GB Members should bring independence, objectivity, impartiality and expertise to both the decision making and challenge processes within the college. All Members have equal voting rights on the GB.

All GB Members must personally subscribe to and uphold the seven principles of public life, set by the Committee on Standards in Public Life - see **Annex A**.

The new Chairs will be required to lead in setting the direction for the GB, establishing a cohesive team, supporting/enabling members to fully contribute, enhancing positive relationships and improving the financial reporting performance, in tandem with ensuring the good governance of the College and effective oversight by the GB. In addition, a Chair must take a constructive and open approach to their work and the development of positive relationships with all other College Chairs, in particular when dealing with sectoral level issues, such as supporting strategic priorities, managing industrial relations, resolving sector funding issues and the adoption of best practice.

The Chair's specific responsibilities include:

Governance
Ensuring that the GB has sufficient support and information to discharge its functions.

Ensuring the GB adheres to its obligations under its Partnership Agreement with the Department for the Economy and, as appropriate, oversees the college's wider adherence to the Agreement's requirements.
Ensuring that the GB takes due account of all statutory regulations, codes of practice and other requirements.
Ensuring that an effective risk management system is in place within the college.
Contributing objectively to the proceedings of the GB and its committees, exercising a challenge role as appropriate.
Approving the arrangements for the appraisal of senior staff, which also complies with sector wide arrangements.
Ensuring compliance with the requirements of the FE (NI) Order 1997 and adherence to the public sector standards applied to Non-Departmental Public Bodies.
Leadership
Providing strong leadership to the GB, ensuring that individual governors work corporately in a cohesive way.
Enabling all governors to make a full contribution to the affairs of the GB. This includes advising new members on their role and responsibilities.
Representing the interests of the college at meetings with the Minister, senior officials and the general public.
Assessing the performance of the Principal and Chief Executive and GB members on an annual basis.
Ensuring that the college acts as a responsible employer. Contributing to the GB's role in the process of appointing, suspending, dismissing and also, determining the pay and conditions of service of senior staff.
Establishing an agreed framework for the pay and conditions of service of all other staff.
Working collaboratively with all other colleges to develop a cohesive FE sector and develop positive relationships with fellow GB Chairs, including within the College Employers' Forum.
Strategic Direction
Leading in determining the mission of the college, the establishment and maintenance of its general character and its medium to long-term strategic direction.
Setting the strategic direction of the college, aligned with Ministerial strategic priorities.

Ensuring that the college delivers against the strategy and policy for FE in Northern Ireland.
Ensuring that the quality of college education/skills provision meets the needs of students, prospective students and employers.
Budget
Ensuring effective oversight of the college's management of performance, financial controls and staff.
Encouraging high standards of propriety and promoting the efficient and effective use of staff and other resources throughout the college.
Monitoring the college's operational and financial performance.
Critically analysing internal and external information/data sources to establish a robust college evidence base to solve problems and make informed decisions.
Providing effective support, oversight and challenge in relation to the successful completion and ongoing management of capital projects, including the delivery of benefit-realisation plans.

You can find further information on board effectiveness and the roles and responsibilities in the [NIAO Good Practice Guide - Board Effectiveness \(June 2022\).pdf](#)

Period of Appointment

An FE College GB Chair will normally serve for a period of four years (one term) but may be considered for appointment for one further term. An annual assessment of the performance of GB Chairs is carried out throughout the period of appointment. Reappointment may be considered subject to satisfactory performance during the initial period of office, continued adherence to the principles of public life and subject to **statutory disqualifications set out in Annex B**. Ultimately, the decision to re-appoint will rest with the Minister responsible for the Department for the Economy.

In accordance with the Code of Practice issued by CPANI, appointments for the same position i.e. on the same GB, are restricted to two terms. An individual who has served for two terms on the GB of one college, is however eligible to apply to serve on the GB of another college should they wish to do so. An existing GB member can be considered for appointment as GB Chair, through open competition. Such an appointment would be to a different position and would count as a new appointment.

Time Commitment and Remuneration

On average, a Chair can expect to commit around one day a week to college business. This includes GB meetings, which are generally held in the evening,

as well as regular interaction with DfE. There are seven to nine full meetings of a GB per year. A Chair is expected to attend all meetings and also, to represent the college at other meetings and public events. A Chair may also have involvement in sub committees, each Committee has about four meetings per year. Additional meetings may be called as required. Engagement with DfE will primarily be through the Director of FE, who is the senior departmental official for the six FE colleges. A Chair, along with the Chairs and Principals/Chief Executives from other colleges, will also participate in the work of the Colleges' Employers Forum, which is responsible for negotiating the terms, conditions of service and remuneration of staff. The operation of this Forum is currently being reviewed.

The post of a GB Chair is remunerated at a rate of £20,000 per annum. Further details are available on request or on the DfE Website at [GB Remuneration](#). You will also be eligible to claim allowances, at Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) rates, for travel and subsistence costs necessarily incurred on GB business. All remuneration and expenses are subject to deduction of income tax and national insurance.

Double Paying

Applicants who already work in the public sector need to be aware that, if appointed, they will be asked to obtain confirmation from their employer that any remuneration due and time worked for this position are truly additional to their existing job role and is not a duplication with salaried employment (unless allowed under the terms and conditions of employment).

In the interests of minimising the potential for double paying to occur the Department reserves the right to contact your employer regarding your candidature.

Nationality

DfE has no public appointments which are restricted to UK and Irish nationals only. However, there is a mandatory requirement to ensure that those appointed do not contravene immigration legislation.

- Commonwealth citizens who have immigration status allowing them to work in the UK may be appointed to any post.
- There is an onus on non-UK and non-RoI citizens to provide proof of their right to work in the UK and an onus on the appointer to check that.

Therefore, it is the responsibility of the individual to provide evidence that they have the appropriate permission if being offered a post. The Department will check the individual's passport, share code or other documents to confirm if they can legally work in the UK.

Training

Appointees to FE College GBs are expected to undergo appropriate training in corporate governance and board membership. You will be expected, as a

condition of your appointment, to participate in appropriate training provided by DfE or the college. All appointees will be supported with additional development needs or training as necessary.

Person Specification

The person specification addresses the qualities, experience, background and competences sought. A criteria-based selection procedure is employed by DfE. This process requires applicants to provide evidence which demonstrates that they can meet the requirements. The mere mention of a skill or attribute is insufficient. Neither can selection panel members make assumptions from the title of a post or the nature of an organisation as to the experience, qualities and skills gained. **For that reason, CVs will not be accepted.**

Make sure that you take full advantage to provide practical evidence and examples of how you feel you are suitable for this appointment. **It is strongly recommended that you read the 'Public Appointments Guide' which contains guidance on the completion of criteria-based application forms and can be found at:**

<https://www.executiveoffice-ni.gov.uk/publications/public-appointments-guide-overview-public-appointments-northern-ireland-and-helpful-information>

The Department will recognise less traditional career patterns and experiences found within the employment field. Therefore, in your application form, you may use examples from your working or personal life e.g. part-time activities or leisure activities, including any voluntary or community work you are or have been involved in.

Qualifications

No specific academic qualifications are required for these appointments.

SELECTION CRITERIA

Eligibility

[Schedule 3](#) of the FE (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 requires that applicants should be, or have previously been, engaged or employed in business, industry or any profession. This is a basic eligibility requirement, and candidates must demonstrate how they meet this criterion. Please note the legislation does not set a minimum time period for this criterion.

For the purposes of this criterion:

- **'business'** means any type of enterprise and includes organisations in the community, voluntary and public sectors; and
- **'any profession'** is defined as an occupation, practice or vocation requiring significant understanding and experience of applying a complex set of knowledge and skills through professional learning and/or practical experience.

Please be aware that DfE employs a broad interpretation of this criterion. **A background in education is not required to undertake the role of GB Chair and is not a criterion for appointment.**

Selection is also based on the essential criteria set out below.

Essential Criteria

Candidates must provide evidence (by way of example) to demonstrate that they have the following skills and knowledge. They will need to show, both on the application form and at interview, how they meet the following criteria:

LEADERSHIP – How **you** have acted as a strategic leader of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation to ensure focus and direction, with a proven track record for delivering results successfully.

CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT - How **you** have applied the principles of corporate governance to effectively address an issue which involved significant governance, financial and risk management considerations to ensure the proper accountability of an organisation you have worked for or have been involved with, including safeguarding its values and reputation and being accountable for its actions and decisions.

PROBLEM SOLVING – How **you** have analysed complex information to make evidence-based decisions in order to deliver successful outcomes in a dynamic and challenging environment.

COLLABORATION- How **you** have successfully demonstrated effective collaboration, strong interpersonal skills and the ability to develop and maintain constructive working relationships and networks with stakeholders/partners to deliver outcomes effectively.

A more detailed explanation of the essential criteria can be found in **Annex C. The criteria are all of equal weight.** Only candidates who meet the eligibility requirement and achieve the minimum score in all essential criteria will be eligible for interview. Where the number of eligible candidates exceeds the number that can reasonably be interviewed, a shortlisting process may be applied.

Applications from Civil Servants/former Civil Servants

It is possible that conflicts of interest could arise in relation to government policy, strategy, or the fair administration of public services and justice during the course of college business. Civil servants, or former civil servants, are welcome to apply for the post of a FE College GB Chair. However, they should be aware that a judgement will be made by the interviewing panel as to whether the nature of his/her employment could lead to a perceived or real split of loyalties of a sufficiently serious nature to render appointment as GB Chair an unmanageable conflict of interest.

Former civil servants are subject to rules on the Acceptance of Outside Business Appointments, Employment or Self-Employment for a period of up to

two years after leaving the NICS. Individuals in this category, who wish to apply, should check their eligibility to do so with NICSHR Employee Relations. You can contact HRConnect using the contact details below:

Email: NICS@HRConnect.nigov.net or External Dial: **0800 1 300 400**

Candidates who are current employees of the NICS are advised, should you be offered an appointment, you will be asked to confirm that you have obtained the necessary approval to undertake private work with another public sector body (including another Government Department) from NICSHR Employee Relations. Further information on this can be found in the [NICS HR Handbook](#), **Section 6.01: Standards of Conduct, Sub Section 6: Private Occupations.**

Current and Former Civil Servants are advised to seek the required authorisation at the start of their application process.

Integrity & Conflicts of Interest

The Department must ensure that potential appointees are committed to the principles and values of public service. These principles are **Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability, Openness, Honesty and Leadership.**

The Department must take account of actual, or perceived, conflicts of interest. Therefore, applicants, in their application form, must disclose information or personal connections, which, if they were to be appointed, could lead to a conflict of interest or be perceived as such. Conflicts of interest may not be a barrier to appointment but both real and perceived conflicts must be discussed with all candidates by the selection panel at interview. This is to ensure that the public can have confidence in the GB's independence and impartiality and the integrity of the potential appointee.

Please refer to the attached **Annex A** for further information on this subject.

SECTION THREE

Application Form

The application form is designed to ensure applicants provide the necessary information to determine how they meet the competition requirements. You will be assessed against the criteria on page 11 and as detailed in **Annex C** of this document. You can use examples from your working life, including any voluntary or community work you are, or have been, engaged in or, if preferred, you can use examples from your personal life.

We are committed to ensuring that our public appointments processes are fair, proportionate, and accessible to all. We welcome applications from people from all backgrounds and are committed to providing reasonable adjustments to support candidates throughout the process. If you require any adjustments to enable you to participate fully in the application or assessment process, please let us know as early as possible. We will consider all requests on an individual

basis and seek to put appropriate arrangements in place. Adjustments may include, for example, alternative formats of documentation or adjustments to interview arrangements.

Data Protection

As much of the information involved in the appointment process will be of a personal nature, the provisions of Data Protection legislation will be followed. To ensure that you are aware of how and why your personal information is to be used, and with whom it may be shared, a DfE Public Appointments 'privacy notice', is available on the following link for your information and reference:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/privacy-notice-public-appointments>

Equal Opportunities Monitoring Form

The Department is required to monitor the gender, ethnic origin, community background and disability of applicants to ensure that equal opportunities measures are effective. The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 defines a person with a disability as someone who has, or has had in the past, a physical or mental impairment which has had a substantial long-term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day to day activities. This includes sensory impairments, people who have had a disability in the past even though they are no longer disabled, people whose disability is likely to last for twelve months or rest of their life, and people whose condition is likely to progress or recur. Severe disfigurement is also acknowledged as a disability.

You are therefore asked to complete the Equal Opportunities Monitoring questionnaire by clicking here:

<https://consultations.nidirect.gov.uk/dfe/equal-opps-nrc-serc-swc-src-chairs/>

This link will take you to Citizen Space, an online survey tool approved for use across the Northern Ireland Civil Service. It has been marked as secure, meeting the required levels of accreditation for public sector use and is fully GDPR compliant. The information you provide is not made available to the panel members and does not play a role in the decision-making process. The Equal Opportunities monitoring questionnaire will be sent to the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency for analysis and will be treated in strict confidence.

Application procedure

You can complete an online application by using the following link:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/appointment-chairs-governing-bodies-nrc-swc-src-serc>

Alternatively, you can request an application form from the DfE Public Appointments Unit at pau@economy-ni.gov.uk or by telephoning: Jean Mageean on 028 9052 9461 (Textrelay: 18001 028 9052 9461) or Neil Morrison on 028 9052 9212 (Textrelay: 18001 028 9052 9212)

Written applications should be posted to:-

Department for the Economy
Public Appointments Unit
First Floor
Adelaide House
39-49 Adelaide Street
Belfast
BT2 8FD

You can apply for any of the four Chair positions through the completion of one application form. Candidates may indicate an interest in one or more of the four colleges included in this competition. Candidates cannot express an order of preference and, if successful, may be appointed by the Minister to any of the colleges for which they have indicated an interest.

For information on the expectations of the role or if you require any clarification on a particular aspect of the role or the criteria being assessed contact Tina Diamond, FE Governance and Accountability Telephone: 028 9025 7467 or email: fegovernance@economy-ni.gov.uk

To ensure equality of opportunity for all applicants:

- CVs, letters, or any other supplementary material in place of, or in addition to, completed application forms **will not be accepted**;
- There is a maximum word count of **400 words** per criterion. Anything over and above that will be redacted by the PAU Administration Team and not seen by the selection panel.
- Submitted application forms must be presented in **Arial format, Font 12**, and within the box provided;
- Applications will be automatically rejected if the box size is changed or the text is not in required format/font size. (Please note you can work in a different font size when drafting before submitting in Font 12); and
- Applications will not be examined until after the closing deadline.

Artificial Intelligence can be a useful tool to support your application, however, all examples and statements provided must be truthful, factually accurate and taken directly from your own experience. Where plagiarism has been identified (presenting the ideas and experiences of others, or generated by artificial intelligence, as your own) applications may be withdrawn. Please see our candidate guidance [Public Appointments - Artificial intelligence and recruitment](#) for more information on appropriate and inappropriate use.

Sift and Shortlisting

Applicants are required to submit evidence of competence against four essential criteria in total. An anonymised sift and short-listing process will be employed (for each background type). The Selection Panel will use a Marking Frame (1-5) to determine how an applicant's skills, knowledge and experience meet each of the criteria.

The eligibility criterion will be assessed on a met/not met basis.

To be eligible for interview candidates must meet the following agreed pass marks:-

Criteria 1 – 4: a score of 3 out of the available 5 marks.

Applications not meeting the minimum requirement set out above in all of the selection criteria will be sifted out.

The Selection Panel reserves the right to apply a scoring system to further shortlist for interview, based on the quality of evidence provided using aggregated marks.

In order to encourage diversity, the Department is committed to interviewing as many eligible applicants as practicable without further shortlisting being applied. However, where a high volume of applications is received, the Panel may decide to limit the number of applicants invited for interview. In such circumstances the Panel will consider the aggregated scores achieved across the essential criteria and determine a cut-off mark for interview. Applicants who achieve the cut-off mark will be invited to interview. If necessary, the Panel may reduce the cut-off mark incrementally to ensure a sufficient pool of candidates is available for interview.

Timeframe for Process

The closing date for receipt of all applications is **12.00 Noon (GMT) on Thursday 8 October 2026.**

Applications received by post will be individually date-stamped and the time of receipt formally recorded. It is the responsibility of the applicant, taking into account their chosen method of delivery, to ensure that sufficient time is allowed for their application to arrive with DfE on or before the deadline. **Late applications will not be accepted.**

Your application will be acknowledged immediately after submission if applying online, or within 2 working days if applying via an email or hardcopy application form.

If you have not received an acknowledgement within this timescale, please contact the DfE Public Appointments Unit by phone to Jean Mageean on 028 9052 9461 or Neil Morrison on 028 9052 9212.

All those sifted out or short-listed out will be provided with feedback on request based on the agreed panel's assessment of their application. If you wish to contest the decision not to shortlist you for interview you should do so

within 5 working days of the date issue of your regrets letter. Further details about the process will be provided in the letter.

INTERVIEWS

Interviews will last approximately 50 minutes. It is expected that interviews will be held between 30 November and 4 December (inclusive) 2026 in the Belfast area.

Those invited to interview are eligible for reimbursement of reasonable receipted travelling expenses incurred within the UK and the ROI. All reasonable receipted dependent carer and/or childcare expenses will also be reimbursed where applicable.

The interview process will consist of a competence-based interview.

Competence-Based Interviews

Competence-based interviewing tests candidates against the specific selection criteria for a particular appointment. The application form gives you an opportunity to provide examples relevant to the specific criteria. These, in turn, provide the interview panel with information and evidence about you, and a deeper understanding of your abilities.

The interview is a crucial part of the appointment process and thorough preparation is essential. You can prepare for the interview by:

- reading and thoroughly understanding the selection criteria;
- reminding yourself of the examples you used in your application form and being prepared to expand on these at interview, if asked;
- rehearsing how you might relate your experiences to the interview panel, emphasising your own role and responsibilities; and
- not assuming that your qualities and experience will speak for themselves.

Guaranteed Interview Scheme (GIS)

The aim of the GIS is to provide applicants with a disability the opportunity to demonstrate their abilities beyond the initial application stage. Applicants who apply under the GIS who meet the eligibility requirement and achieve the minimum score of 3 in each essential criterion at the sift stage will automatically be offered an interview. Their application will not be subjected to any shortlisting which may take place.

Pre-appointment Checks

Before the names of suitable candidates are presented to the Minister a Company Director's disqualification check and a bankruptcy check will be carried out. In addition, a cross-departmental check will be carried out on the probity and performance of those candidates who currently hold or have held public appointment roles.

Candidates offered an appointment may also need to complete a criminal record check as part of the appointment process.

Presentation of Results

Ministerial choice is a key element of public appointment policy that enables Minister(s) to indicate if they wish to have the names of candidates suitable for appointment presented in a ranked (strict merit order) or unranked (alphabetical) list. The DfE Minister, Dr Caoimhe Archibald, has made it known that her preference on the presentation of results is an unranked list.

Publicising Appointments

A press release will be published to announce the appointment. Upon appointment, a candidate will be required to complete a political activity form and provide a short biography for publication. The press release will include, the candidate's name, a short description of the body to which they have been appointed, a brief summary of the skills and knowledge the candidate brings to the role, the length of the appointment term and details of the candidate's response to the political activity questionnaire.

Complaints Procedure

The Public Appointments Unit (PAU) within the DfE is committed to the principles of public appointments as set out in the CPANI Code of Practice.

If at any stage you feel you have reason to complain, details of the Department's PAU Complaints Procedure can be found at:

<https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/public-appointments-unit-complaints-procedure>

Integrity and Conflicts of Interest – Guide for Candidates

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the information contained in the leaflet 'Guidance on Conflict of Interest, Integrity and How to raise a Complaint' produced by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments, Northern Ireland, which provides examples of the types of issues that may give rise to conflicts of interests.

1. In 1995, the Committee on Standards in Public Life **defined seven principles**, which should underpin the actions of all who serve the public in any way. These are:

Selflessness: Members should act solely in terms of the public interest.

Integrity: Members 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: Members must act and take decisions impartially, fairly and on merit, using the best evidence and without discrimination or bias.

Accountability: Members are accountable to the public for their decisions and actions and must submit themselves to the scrutiny necessary to ensure this.

Openness: Members 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: Members should be truthful.

Leadership: *Holders of public office should exhibit these principles in their own behaviour and treat others with respect. They should actively promote and robustly support the principles and challenge poor behaviour wherever it occurs.*

2. All candidates who put themselves forward for a public appointment must be able to demonstrate their commitment to the principles and values of public service. One of the issues which might arise in relation to this is that of conflict of interest.

What is a conflict of interest?

3. Public Appointments require the highest standards of propriety, involving impartiality, integrity and objectivity, in relation to the stewardship of public funds and the oversight and management of all related activities. This means that any private, voluntary, charitable or political interest which might be material and relevant to the work of the body concerned should be declared. There is always the possibility for real or perceived conflicts of interest to arise. Both are a problem, as the perceived inference of a conflict may, on occasions, be as damaging as the existence of a real conflict.
4. No-one should use, or give the appearance of using, their public position to further their private interests. This is an area of particular importance, as it is of considerable concern to the public and receives a lot of media attention. It is important, therefore, that you consider your circumstances when applying for a public appointment and identify any potential conflicts of interest, whether real or perceived.

Surely a perceived conflict is not a problem, as long as I act impartially at all times?

5. The integrity of the individual is not in question here. However, it is necessary for the standing of the individual and the Board that members of the public have confidence in their independence and impartiality. Even a perceived conflict of interest on the part of a Board Member can be extremely damaging to the body's reputation and it is therefore essential that these are declared and explored, in the same way as an actual conflict would be. The fact that a member acted impartially may be no defence against accusations of potential bias.

What should I do if I think I have a conflict of interest?

6. You will find a section on conflicts of interest in the application form for you to complete. This asks you to consider and declare whether or not you have a real, or perceived, conflict. If you are unsure if your circumstances constitute a possible conflict, you should still complete this section, in order to give selection panel members as much information as possible.

If I declare a conflict, does this mean I will not be considered for appointment?

7. No - each case is considered individually. If you are short-listed for interview, the panel will explore with you how far the conflict might affect your ability to contribute effectively and impartially on the Board and how this might be handled, if you were to be appointed. For example, it may be possible to arrange for you to step out of meetings where an issue is discussed, in which you have an interest. However, if, following the discussion with you, the panel believes that the conflict is too great and would call into question the probity of the Board or the appointment, they can withdraw your application from the competition.

8. The report on the outcome of the interview process which is put to the Minister will include clear written reference to any perceived or actual conflicts of interest or integrity issues connected to any candidate put forward as suitable for appointment. It will include sufficient information to ensure that the Minister is fully aware of any of these matters and can make an informed decision.

What happens if I do not declare a known conflict, which is then discovered by the Department after my appointment?

9. Again, each case would be considered on its merits, but the Department may take the view that by concealing a conflict of interest, you would be deemed to have breached the Seven Principles of Conduct Underpinning Public Life and may terminate your appointment.

What happens if I do not realise a potential conflict exists?

10. This situation may arise where the candidate is not familiar with the broad range of work which a body covers and therefore does not realise that a conflict might exist. In some cases, the panel, with their wider knowledge of the body, might deduce that there is a potential conflict issue, based on the information on employment and experience provided by the candidate in the application form. They will then explore this at interview with the candidate.

What happens if a conflict of interest arises after an appointment is made?

11. This could arise for two main reasons. The first is that the member's circumstances may change, for example, they may change jobs and in doing so, a conflict with their work on the Board becomes apparent. The second is where a member is unfamiliar with the range of the work of the body, but after appointment, it becomes clear that a conflict exists where none had been envisaged during the appointment process.
12. In both cases, the issue should be discussed with the Chair of the Board and the Chief Executive, in consultation with the Partner Department, to decide whether or not the member can continue to carry out their role in an appropriate manner and each case is considered individually.
13. It may be that the conflict is such that it would be impractical for the member to continue on the Board, if they would have to withdraw from a considerable amount of the body's routine business. In such cases, the member may be asked to stand down from the body.

Disqualifications associated with positions on Governing Bodies

There are statutory disqualifications associated with positions on GBs. You are not eligible for **appointment** as Chair of a GB:-

- Where, in regard to a college you intend applying for, you have previously served two full terms of office of four years each, whether or not consecutive, as Chair of the GB. This condition does not apply if you served as Chair prior to 2007.
- If you are a Chair or Member of the GB of another college
- If you are a full-time student at the College
- If you are a member of staff of the College or if you are a member of staff of another institution of further education established under the Further Education (NI) Order 1997
- If you are a Member of the NI Assembly
- If you have been removed from the membership of a GB of an institution of further education established under the 1997 Order
- If you have been removed from the GB or its equivalent in any organisation grant-aided for the purposes of providing education
- If you have, within five years of the date your appointment would take effect, been convicted in a court in the United Kingdom, the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or the Irish Republic of any offence and have been sentenced to imprisonment (whether suspended or not) for a period of not less than three months without the option of a fine
- If you are included in a list kept by the Department of Education under Regulation 8 of the Education (Prohibition from Teaching or Working with Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007
- If you are included (other than provisionally) in the list maintained as required by Article 6 of The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007
- If your estate has been sequestrated, you have been adjudged bankrupt, you have made an arrangement with your creditors, or you have granted a trust deed for your creditors or a composition contract
- If DfE reasonably believes that you are not fit to hold office

These disqualifications are applicable on appointment and will not impact on your eligibility to submit an application if your circumstances are due to change before the appointment starts. For example, if you are a Member/Chair of the GB of another college, a full-time student at the College you wish to apply for or a member of staff of any college at the time of submitting your application, you could be considered for appointment if you will no longer be in this position when the appointment is due to start.

The central concept is that you **cannot** serve as a GB Chair **at the same time** as any of the circumstances listed. If you wish to seek clarification on the impact of this from a personal perspective, please contact us.

Where any person is disqualified, the disqualification shall cease:-

- a. if that person's estate had been sequestrated, when the sequestration is recalled or reduced or they are discharged under or by virtue of The Insolvency (Northern Ireland) Order 1989;
- b. if adjudged bankrupt, on the discharge from bankruptcy or from the date of annulment if the bankruptcy order is annulled;
- c. if disqualified because that person had made an arrangement with creditors, or granted a trust deed for creditors or a composition contract, the disqualification shall cease when the arrangement or, as the case may be, the trust deed or composition contract is no longer in force; or
- d. if that person is no longer included:
 - i. on a list kept by the Department of Education under Regulation 8 of the Education (Prohibition from Teaching or Working with Children) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2007; or
 - ii. in the list maintained as required by Article 6 of The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (Northern Ireland) Order 2007.

Detailed Explanation of Essential Criteria

1. **LEADERSHIP** – How **you** have acted as a strategic leader of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation to ensure focus and direction, with a proven track record for delivering results successfully.
2. **CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT** - How **you** have applied the principles of corporate governance to effectively address an issue which involved significant governance, financial and risk management considerations to ensure the proper accountability of an organisation you have worked for or have been involved with, including safeguarding its values and reputation and being accountable for its actions and decisions.
3. **PROBLEM SOLVING**– How **you** have analysed complex information to make evidence-based decisions in order to deliver successful outcomes in a dynamic and challenging environment.
4. **COLLABORATION**- How **you** have successfully demonstrated effective collaboration, strong interpersonal skills and the ability to develop and maintain constructive working relationships and networks with stakeholders/partners to deliver outcomes effectively.

More detail is set out below.

1. LEADERSHIP

How you have acted as a strategic leader of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation to ensure focus and direction, with a proven track record for delivering results successfully.

As Chair, you will have responsibility for leading the governing body. Within this context, leadership should be understood as the process by which chairs establish and demonstrate the values and mission of the sector and college.

As an effective Chair you will be expected to:

- lead and motivate others;
- manage diversity and build effective cohesive teams;
- lead the setting of strategic vision and purpose for the college;
- promote and fully engage with collaboration across the FE sector;
- effectively resolve conflict;
- interface constructively with the college senior management team and senior departmental officials;
- create a culture of adaptability, flexibility and responsiveness; and

- build a strong network of collaborative relationships across the governing body and FE sector.

Examples of evidence the panel will be looking for are:

- **your** ability to provide clear strategic direction and guidance and develop individuals into a cohesive and effective team;
- **your** ability to set a compelling vision and lead from the front to achieve outcomes responding effectively to changing requirements;
- **your** ability to ensure that business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation is effective and that the skills and experience of team members are harnessed, so that every individual contributes;
- **your** ability to effectively resolve conflicts or disagreements between team members;
- **your** ability to demonstrate strong values and be adaptive, flexible and resilient leadership;
- **your** ability to build partnerships and work collaboratively across a broad range of settings to achieve outcomes;
- **your** ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships with a broad range of stakeholders.

2. CORPORATE GOVERNANCE, ACCOUNTABILITY AND RISK MANAGEMENT

How you have applied the principles of corporate governance to effectively address an issue which involved significant governance, financial and risk management considerations to ensure the proper accountability of an organisation you have worked for or have been involved with, including safeguarding its values and reputation and being accountable for its actions and decisions.

In this context, governance is about the direction and supervision of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation. It means making sure that the organisation is well run (or governed), complies with the governance framework associated with its legal status (FE colleges are Non-Departmental Public Bodies) and carries out the work it was set up to do. This involves planning for the future, guarding the organisation's values and reputation, delivering effective oversight of the organisation's management of performance, financial controls and resources, making sure the organisation is operating a robust risk management approach and appropriate levels of accountability, oversight and assurance. It also involves holding the leadership of the organisation to account and being accountable for its actions and decisions, providing direction and challenging appropriately to make sure the organisation addresses any issues/areas for improvement in a timely manner.

As an effective Chair you will be expected to:

- ensure effective governance;
- embed an effective risk management approach;
- effectively monitor and analyse college performance;
- respond to underperformance;
- safeguard the college's values and reputation;

- plan for the future;
- behave with integrity, be open, objective and accountable;
- positively challenge established thinking and assumptions;
- monitor and report on the financial health of the organisation;
- drive and deliver a culture that emphasises continuous improvement and value for money to maintain delivery within the allocated budget, effectively managing competing financial priorities; and
- identifying areas of concern and challenging/questioning appropriately

Examples of evidence the panel will be looking for are:

- understanding **your** role and collective responsibilities in the promotion of effective governance within an organisation;
- **your** ability to deliver results in line with organisational values and purpose, on an individual basis and through the organisation's people;
- **your** ability to identify, understand, evaluate and manage risks which may have an adverse impact on the performance of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation;
- **your** ability to ensure systems of internal control are in place to support the achievement of policies, aims and objectives;
- **your** ability to ensure the effective management, monitoring and reporting of an organisation's financial position;
- **your** ability to monitor, understand and interpret critical financial information, to identify areas of concern, obtain adequate explanations and challenge assumptions;
- **your** ability to provide oversight and challenge to senior management to make strategic decisions on spend.

3. PROBLEM SOLVING

How you have analysed complex information to make evidence-based decisions in order to deliver successful outcomes in a dynamic and challenging environment.

As Chair, part of your role will be to provide strategic leadership to the college. This will include, taking full account of the requirement to implement key Executive and Departmental objectives which underpin the direction of the FE sector. This will require you to analyse issues using relevant information sources, assessing risks and generating options, in order to make effective and timely decisions.

As an effective Chair you will be expected to:

- understand and influence and develop strategy;
- maintain a broad perspective;
- take account of Executive and Departmental priorities,
- have organisational and business acumen;
- lead in developing and ensuring the successful delivery of the college's strategy, business plan and objectives;
- analyse complex data to provide clarity;
- listen/gather feedback;
- make timely and quality decisions based on the evidence;

- solve problems; and
- challenge constructively.

Examples of evidence the panel will be looking for are:

- **your** involvement in the preparation, monitoring and review of the strategic plan of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation;
- **your** ability to contribute to the processes by which a sector strategic plan and an implementation/business plan are agreed and progress monitored towards the targets which they contain;
- **your** ability to address and respond to competing and changing priorities in developing and implementing the strategic direction of a business, voluntary, community or public sector organisation;
- **your** ability to demonstrate the skills required to analyse complex information, contribute to effective corporate governance, to understand the quality of own thinking and decisions and seek feedback where appropriate;
- **your** preparedness and ability to make evidence informed decisions quickly;
- **your** ability to analyse issues in the face of problems, decide who needs to be involved and generate options;
- **your** ability to articulate options, weigh up competing views, challenge constructively to reach good decisions.

4 COLLABORATION

How you have successfully demonstrated effective collaboration, strong interpersonal skills, and the ability to develop and maintain constructive working relationships and networks with stakeholders/partners to deliver outcomes effectively.

As Chair, one of your key responsibilities will be to effectively engage, communicate with and positively influence a wide and varied audience of college partners, including key stakeholders such as college workforce representatives, in order to deliver the strategic vision and various aims of your college and the wider FE sector.

An effective Chair will be expected to:

- represent the interests of the college at meetings with the Minister, senior officials, employees/their representatives and the general public;
- use persuasive, compelling and informed arguments to influence others, overcome disagreements and achieve positive outcomes;
- have an open communication style, engage positively in debate and seek to balance views and resolve difficult and complex issues;
- show sensitivity in addressing and resolving the concerns of others;
- gain/enhance the commitment of stakeholders/partners in support of the organisation's aims;

- work constructively and collaboratively within the FE sector to achieve wider sectoral objectives/priorities on a range of policy and operational issues;
- effectively support the college's management and development of its workforce; and
- engage constructively with internal and external stakeholders to develop positive relationships.

Examples of evidence the panel will be looking for from candidates are the ability to:

- actively create, develop and maintain constructive and collaborative working relationships and networks, with both internal and external stakeholders/partners;
- use persuasive and compelling arguments which influence others to understand and accept different approaches and perspectives;
- communicate with conviction and clarity, identify suitable communication methods and style depending on the audience and the situation;
- communicate effectively with a wide range of individuals, including senior leaders and key stakeholders/partners, such as workforce representatives;
- positively influence and negotiate with others, challenging constructively where necessary and, at the same time, maintain effective working relationships and networks.