

Northern Regional College

Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 9 November 2016 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus commencing at 4.00pm

Present Mr R Jay (Chair), Cllr B Hutchinson, Dr K McCambridge, Prof T Scott (Principal).

In Attendance Dr S Brankin, Ms L Firth, Mr D Hewitt, Mr M Higgins, Mrs C Robinson (Secretary)

Prof Scott introduced Ms Laura Firth the newly appointed Head of Student Experience.

The Chair welcomed Ms Firth to the meeting along with new Governing Body members Dr K McCambridge and Cllr B Hutchinson and Secretary, Mrs C Robinson.

The Chair advised that the new Student Governor, Jonathan Hannah had expressed an interest in joining the Committee. A proposal would be put to the Governing Body for approval at its meeting in November.

31.1 Apologies

Mr B McCluggage, Mr K Nelson, Prof M McKinney.

31.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

31.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The Committee approved the minutes of the last meeting held on 17 February 2016.

31.4 Matters Arising

30.4 ETI Report – the Chair sought clarification regarding the Report from the Scrutiny visit in Feb 2016

Prof Scott advised that a number of areas for improvement had been identified following a scrutiny inspection. These areas had since been addressed and a response was being finalised as part of the 2016 submission. Prof Scott noted that the District Inspector had confirmed that ETI were amending the SER/QIP process and timing this year and that scrutiny of SER/QIP would take place at some point during the year and not during a week long visit in February, as had been the case in previous years.

Action: 2016 ETI report to be circulated to Education Committee members and uploaded on to Minutepad.

30.8 Common Induction for Students – in response to the Chair's enquiry on how the induction process had worked Prof Scott advised that the introduction of the Guidebook App had been a significant development. This resource provided for a more a streamlined induction process with a view to having improved consistency of induction activities in place for 2017.

In response to a query from Cllr Hutchinson, Dr Brankin noted that the level of definition was not sufficient to get information on usage by mature students.

The Committee noted that the student survey (relating to induction) had been circulated and an update would be provided to the next meeting.

30.12 Student Union Constitution – Prof Scott advised the constitution deferred at the last committee meeting had been revised and with the Chair’s agreement had been presented directly to the Governing Board for approval at the July 2016 meeting. She reported that new systems were now in place and appointments for the current year had been made in line with the new constitution.

31.5 Chair’s Communications

None.

31.6 Correspondence

i) DfE circular FE 07/10 Addendum 9 – Entry Level ICT provision

The Committee noted the Departmental circular, the details of which would feed into the curriculum planning process. No impact was expected.

ii) Lecturers Into Industry (Lii) Pilot

Prof Scott gave information on the long standing scheme which had provided opportunities for placements within industry and reported that following evaluation the Department had decided that the current scheme would not continue.

Mr Hewitt advised that the closure of the scheme presented a challenge as the scheme was the vehicle/funding to enable staff to undertake industrial placements identified in the Strategic Improvement Plan. He indicated that the Department was exploring an alternative, more flexible scheme and the College was considering how participants would be identified and selected for placement. He stated that the financial implications of the change would be examined and the Strategic Improvement Plan target would be discussed with DfE

iii) Revised operating model for quality assessment

Prof Scott referred to the two papers circulated and noted that the new approach to oversight required the Governing Body to provide an annual assurance on the quality of the higher education provision. She drew attention to the form which had to be completed and advised that current reporting practices to the Governing Body and its Committees provided the necessary evidence to support the assurances required on oversight of internal procedures.

It was noted that the timing for completing the return on HE assurance was 1 December 2016

Prof Scott also reported that the SER/QIP was currently being finalised and noted that the DfE had requested the submission of evidence be presented in three distinct sections, namely: FE, HE and WBL. Accordingly the section on higher education would be presented to meet the new QA requirements. Prof Scott noted that a number of key staff contributing to this submission were currently out ill and she was overseeing the preparation.

The Chair acknowledged the pressures arising from the new approach and the scheduling of the return, and stressed that it was essential that the Education Committee and the Governing Body review/discuss the documentation relating to quality assurance prior to submission of the assurance statement on 1 December.

He noted that the Committee had experienced difficulties with the circulation of the SER/QIP report in the past and questioned whether the current guidelines were fit for purpose.

Prof Scott indicated the FE and WBL section of the Self Evaluation Review were required to follow the IQ:RS guidelines and while the HE section aligned to the revised QAA guidelines.

In order to progress the matter Prof Scott proposed that a draft SER/QIP report would be circulated to the Education Committee by Friday 11 November 2016. Members were asked to provide feedback and make a recommendation to the Governing Body at its meeting on 16 November 2016. The Governing Body Chair had been made aware of the situation.

Committee members confirmed they were content to receive and comment on the SER/QIP report prior to the Governing Body meeting and noted that the assurance required by the Department was contained within the SER/QIP report.

Prof Scott thanked the Committee members for their cooperation on the matter.

31.7 Strategic Improvement Plan

Dr Brankin spoke to the update report highlighting key points to note. He commented on the positive outturn for the previous year and made reference to particular achievements in relation to actions within the Plan ie student retention and communication, teaching and learning advisors, digital learning and recruitment to key posts.

The Committee considered the report noting in particular the pressures on enrolment. Cllr Hutchinson commented on potential impact/damage to the College as a result of reduced enrolment and asked what could be done to tackle the issue of post primary schools provision.

Prof Scott referred to the implications of the extended vocational provision within post primary schools and advised that she had raised her concerns with the Department. The Director of FE at DfE had noted concerned and confirmed that the issue would be taken forward with DE as part of the 16-19 review. Prof Scott advised members that she had also requested a study be carried out of trends/ changes in curriculum provision with in post primary schools.

The Committee discussed alternative plans to improve enrolment and retention.

31.8 2016/17 MaSN Provision

The Committee considered the update report circulated noting that the College had not met its overall recruitment target due to difficulties with progression and retention in year 2. Enrolment statistics for year 2 courses were highlighted and reasons for the significant drop in progression for the Foundation Degree in engineering were discussed.

31.9 Curriculum Plan

Dr Brankin referred to the report circulated and provided an update on the current position with regards to curriculum planning. He reported that a bottom up approach to the planning process had been initiated to include input and review from individuals/teams throughout the College. Work on the 2017/18 Curriculum Plan was well underway with a completion expected by the end of December.

The Chair drew attention to the size of the intake reported for HE and advised that the aim should be to exceed rather than just meet target numbers.

The Committee noted the update report on curriculum planning for 2017/18.

31.10 Corporate Challenge Report

Dr Brankin provided an overview of the presentation circulated, which highlighted developments in the areas of classroom/lesson observations, challenge sessions/course reviews, quality centre review visits, HE quality assurance, student surveys and efficiency challenges for the period June to November 2016.

The Chair highlighted the requirement for the Governing Body to sign a Quality Assessment Statement and queried the proposal that assurance would be partial for 2015/16 as processes did not include student consultation. Dr Brankin confirmed the aim was to achieve full assurance.

The Committee noted the wide ranging programme of improvements and efficiencies which included plans for progressing centralising timetabling in the coming year.

Mr Higgins left the meeting (5.35pm).

31.11 Student Union

The Chair referred to the report circulated noting that although valuable the level of detail included was not required. He praised the significant progress made in relation to election of class representatives and noted action had been taken to encourage greater student response in some curriculum areas.

Prof Scott stated that she was pleased with the progress in relation to the appointment and training of class reps and that the college wide approach to increasing student representatives had been successful.

The Chair also commented on the under spend reported within the support fund area and noted that communication on the available provision required development. Prof Scott confirmed that the Head of Student Experience was reviewing the matter and an action plan would be developed for improved communications and awareness in 2016/17

The Committee noted that the progress report.

31.12 Digital Learning Strategy

The Committee noted the progress report for the period May to November 2016.

Dr Brankin reported that key staff appointments were now complete and all platforms were in place. Development work in support of the strategy was now fully underway.

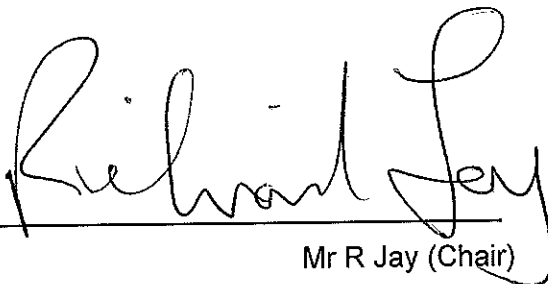
31.13 Any Other Business

None.

31.14 Date of next meeting

The next meeting of the Committee would be held on Wednesday, 15 February 2017 at 4.00pm at Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 5.45pm.


Mr R Jay (Chair)

Date 22 / 2 / 17
22 February 2017


Mrs C Robinson (Secretary)