

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 6 December 2011 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O'Kane (Chairperson), Mr R Jay and Mr K Nelson

In Attendance Mr I Houston, Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

10.1 Faculty Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Mr Gerard Quinn, Head of the Faculty of Well-Being & Lifelong Learning. At the outset Mr Quinn provided an overview of the structure of his Faculty and gave details of the number of staff and students and of the range and level of courses. Referring to performance management he described how the Faculty derived enrolment targets, which are fed up from Course Teams to Heads of School and on to the Head of Faculty and the CMT. Once targets have been set then they are passed down to Course Teams again. He stated that a similar process applied to achievement targets. He explained how quality improvement and target achievements were incorporated into the Faculty Operational Plan, which was communicated to Course Teams at the Faculty September Road Shows.

The Committee expressed its appreciation in regard to the impressive work performed by the Faculty. The Chair commended, in particular, the rigorous measures in place to monitor retention and achievement.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Quinn for an interesting presentation and asked him to pass on her thanks to the Heads of School.

10.2 Apologies

An apology was received from Mr T Neilands and Ms S Cassidy.

10.3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

10.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 11 October 2011, were approved.

10.5 Matters Arising

10.5.1 Terms of Reference (minute 9.1c) and 9.7 a))

The Chairperson reminded Members that they had asked, at the last meeting on 11 October 2011, for clarification to be obtained as to whether 'Staff Development' and 'Monitoring the Award of IIP' were to be included under the remit of the Education Committee or the Staffing Committee.

It was noted that the Chairman and Members of the Staffing Committee had been consulted and had expressed the view that both Committees should continue to give consideration to these matters, as they would be looking at them from different perspectives.

10.5.2 Education Committee Action Plan (minute 9.12)

The Committee (11 October 2011) considered the Education Committee Action Plan 2011/2012 and suggested that the wording of some of the activities should be adjusted.

The Committee received and approved a revised version of the Action Plan.

10.5.3 College Health Checks (minute 9.8c))

The Committee (11 October 2011) noted that Mr Jay had suggested that targets should be included in the Table detailing FLU and Enrolment Outcomes; the Committee had agreed that DEL should be informed. Mr Houston advised that this matter would be raised at the forthcoming meeting with DEL representatives on 8 December 2011

10.6 Chairperson's Communications

The Chairperson stated that she had attended the Chairs' Committee (14 November 2011), which received a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the Colleges Northern Ireland Board, held on 20 September 2011. It was agreed that Chairs should advise their Committees of any pertinent issues discussed at Board meetings. It was noted that a lengthy discussion had taken place at the Board meeting about the Entitlement Framework. Members were particularly concerned about the possible effects of Circular 2011/09, which stipulates that collaboration funding will cease in 2012/2013. The Chief Executive was requested to write to DEL to ask for this matter to be raised with DE.

It was noted that both the DEL and DE Ministers would be visiting the College in the New Year, which would provide an opportunity to discuss this matter. The Committee stressed the need for young people to continue to receive quality vocational education.

10.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

a) DEL Circular FE 08/08, dated 14 October 2011, providing information regarding procedures for the payment of Childcare Support to students enrolled on Learner

Access and Engagement provision, for the period 1 October 2011 and 31 March 2012 only.

b) DEL Circular, dated 19 October 2011, regarding arrangements for the Department's Employer Support Programme, which will provide a dedicated fund to support FE College engagement with employers. The Department has been allocated some £5.9m to fund the Programme from 2011/2012 to 2014/2015.

It was noted that proposals for Year 1 had already been submitted and a Three-Year Sector Strategic Plan and accompanying projects for years 2-4 of the programme should be submitted by 27 January 2012. The Committee commented on the very demanding monitoring arrangements demanded by the Programme. It expressed disappointment that it appeared that NRC had not been selected as a Lead College for any of the projects. However, the Deputy Director Support and Development informed the Committee that from 2012-15 each of the 6 Colleges would have a lead in a particular theme as well as contributing to each project.

10.8 Performance Management

The Committee received a Report detailing the use of Performance Management to support the continuous quality improvement agenda within the College and to ensure a high standard and consistent approach across the curriculum.

The Committee noted that a cycle of monitoring performance is being developed in respect of:

- a) FLU Performance. It was noted that the College failed to achieve its overall target (6,493 FLUs) by just 21 FLUs during 2010/2011.
- b) Retention Rates. The overall retention figures (87%) for 2010/2011 show an increase over the three-year period 2008-2011. Of particular note has been the improvement in the retention rates in part-time FE and Essential Skills.
- c) Achievement Rates. The overall achievement rates have increased in 2010/2011 but the College is still planning to increase the achievement rates in 2011/2012 in Part-Time FE and in Essential Skills.
- d) Success Rates. The success rates show the number of students, who achieved an award as a percentage of the students, who started the academic year. The outcome for 2010/2011 (63 %) shows an increase over the previous two years.
- e) Enrolments and FLUs. It was noted that the College's FLU Management Plan had been brought into action to attempt to make up the projected shortfall in FLUs. Specifically the College intends to achieve higher retention rates, to boost the number of part-time courses and to claim FLUs for the tutorial period undertaken by all full-time students.
- f) Retention Rates 2011/2012. The College's strategy of concentrating on retaining students in the first 8 weeks of the academic year has been a success and the dropout rate has halved from 220 students in 2010/2011 to 117 in 2011/2012.
- g) Proposed Targets for 2011/2012. The proposed whole-course targets are as follows for Retention (FT FE 80% and FT HE 85%), Achievement (FT FE 84% and FT HE 90%) and Success (FT FE 67% and FT HE 76%).
- h) Entitlement Framework. Entitlement Framework numbers for 2011/2012 (2,443) are similar to 2010/2011 (2,446). The projected income for 2011/2012 is £1.76m.
- i) External Quality Indicators. It was noted that the College had achieved a Grade 3 (Good) in the Follow-Up L3 Priority Skills Construction; the ETI has indicated that good arrangements are in place for Pastoral Care; the Internal Auditors have awarded substantial assurance for the Review of Risk Management; and the QAA Development Engagement Team has had no essential recommendations to make regarding practice at the College.
- j) Overall NRC Inspections. The College has now achieved its minimum target of Grade 3 (Good) in all areas inspected except Manufacturing and Mechanical Engineering, which has achieved a grade 2 (Very Good).
- k) Training Provision KPIs 2011/2012. Targets for KPIs have been set for the whole training provision as follows: enrolments (901); retention (82%); success (55%); work placements (50%); Income from Personal Training Plans (100%); and gross income (£4.129m).
- l) Retention Training Courses. The training retention rate for 2010/2011 was 89%; the current retention rate is 99% but this will vary as the year progresses.
- m) TMS Training Statistics. The KPIs are also recorded on TMS and must be presented annually to DEL and ETI in an IQRS document. The average retention rate (42%) is lower than the 'in-year' figures as a result of the method used to manage summer work placements. The success rates reported in IQRS show an average success rate of 55% with rates varying from 13% in Programme Led Apprentice (PLA) completers to 92% in ELA Year 2.
- n) Work Placement Rates. In difficult economic circumstances the PLA Year 1 work placement rate for 2011/2012, as at 25 November 2011, was 31%; the rate for PLA Year 2 was better at 51%. The Skills at Work strand has an assessment period of 12 weeks and cannot be placed until this is conducted.

o) Economic Engagement. Economic Engagement activity in the College is subjected to the same level of rigour in the planning process as other curriculum provision. Monitoring of KPIs has commenced. In November the expected activity versus target activity summary indicates that there is a £45 variance anticipated during 2011/2012 for external funded work. This can be explained by the variance in the Employer Support Programme funds. A variance in the gross and net income targets and a subsequent reduction of approximately 2000 staff hours required to deliver the work. It was noted that different sources of funding, and pricing and delivery strategies were being reviewed.

10.9 Quality Improvement Report

The Committee received a Report detailing the following quality improvement reviews and activities undertaken since its last meeting:

a) Quality Assurance Agency – Integrated Quality Enhancement Review 18-20 October 2011. The QAA team has identified areas of good practice and made a number of advisable recommendations in relation to the following core areas: the quality of learning opportunities; and the provision of public information. No essential recommendations have resulted from the Review. The QAA draft report has been received and is being checked for factual inaccuracies. NRC is presently collating an Action Plan to address the advisable recommendations.

b) Priority Skills Area Level 3 Construction 9-10 November 2011. The planned Follow-Up Inspection of L3 Construction took place on 9-10 November 2011. The Inspection Team identified strengths, effective strategies and good practices, which have been put in place since the original inspection in May 2009. The Team also listed a number of continuing areas for improvement. The College has been awarded a revised grade (Grade 3 – Good).

c) ETI Pastoral Scoping Survey – October 2011. The Scoping Survey focussed on safeguarding arrangements at the College. The Survey concluded that the College has very good arrangements in place.

d) Deloitte Leadership and Management Project. Modules 3-6 of the Deloitte's Leadership and Management Project have been completed or are in the course of completion. It was noted that all six colleges have identified projects, which were the focus of a recent SMT residential. The NRC project is 'Using Performance Management for Continuous Quality Improvement'.

10.10 Economic Engagement Report

The Committee received an Economic Engagement Report, which provided the following details:

a) International Staff and Student Exchanges. Staff and students from Finland, Spain and Germany have visited the College;

b) Visit to Morehead State University. Two staff and two students visited Morehead in October 2011;

c) Workshop on Community Planning at the Braid. Senior Managers participated in a workshop on themes identified by the Ballymena Borough Council.

d) DEL's Employer Support Programme. The Committee noted the following projects and NRC's involvement compared with the Sector:

i) Advancing Enterprise. NRC students, with the support of mentors, will work on live projects for business. Funding of £29.6k has been secured for the project;

ii) InnoTech. NRC is focusing on providing Knowledge Transfer and mentoring support in two areas – engineering and advanced construction. £28.5k has been secured;

iii) Carbon Zero NI. NRC will continue to work with contractors and sub-contractors in relation to the establishment of an audit process for the responsible sourcing of materials. £23.6k has been secured;

iv) Open Source. NRC will work with businesses to provide tailored ICT solutions to meet their needs. £18.7k has been secured.

10.11 Any Other Notified Business

10.11.1 Monitoring Process

Mr Jay referred to the quantity and high quality of papers received by the Committee but questioned whether these enabled the Committee to monitor successfully the College's educational provision. He questioned, for example, whether the Committee had the information needed to identify under-performance. Mr Houston and Dr O'Mullan assured the Committee that this matter was being addressed and a list of courses, which were under-performing, would be made available at a future meeting. They also drew attention to the availability of standardised and consistent data at the College and across the Sector, which would assist with benchmarking.

There was no further notified business to report. The meeting concluded at 7.20 pm.

10.12 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 20 March 2012 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

Una O'Kane, Chairperson

Jim Hunter, Secretary