

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 20 March 2012 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

11.1 Faculty Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Ms Clare O’Neill, Head of Economic Engagement. At the outset Ms O’Neill provided an overview of the structure of her Department and gave details of the responsibilities of her team. She described the work undertaken by the sections in her Department: Training for Success (TFS) and Apprenticeships NI; Economic Engagement; Upskilling; and Economic Engagement Enterprise and Entrepreneurship.

a) TFS and Apprenticeships NI. The College was still awaiting information from DEL regarding the tender process for the recontracting for TFS/Apprenticeships NI; this was proving a major disadvantage for Colleges particularly in relation to recruitment. Ms O’Neill advised the Committee that the current retention rate was 92% against a target of 82%. She referred to the high profile of the students, seven of which had entered for this year’s DEL Apprentice of the Year awards. She added that her Department had a role to play in the NRC entries for the forthcoming UK Skills competitions. The College Training Plan was presently being collated for 2012/13.

b) Economic Engagement. Ms O’Neill said that Economic Engagement was working in conjunction with Faculties in the preparation of Faculty Plans. She stated that her Department was currently involved in the Employer Support Programme for 2011/1012 and she made mention of Innotech NI, Open Source, Advancing Enterprise and Carbon Zero programmes. Ms O’Neill indicated that DEL had made some £6 million available to the Sector over the next three years for the Employer Support Programme, which would focus on 6 key areas each with a lead College for each: NRC is the thematic lead for Advancing Engineering and Manufacturing.

She provided figures for planned funded income and net cost recovery income for 2011/2012. It was noted that the net cost recovery income was £128k against a target of £143k. Mr Jay made reference to the low recovery costs and was advised that it was essential for the College to participate in innovative courses even though the recovery costs were low. The benefits of these courses were also stressed as they provided staff with the opportunity to up-skill and participate in pioneering programmes. It was noted that a funding checklist was being developed, which would be applied to all future tenders.

Ms O’Neill provided details of several external funding applications made by Economic Engagement including INSPIRE, COGe, Neighbourhood Renewal DSD Bid, EMI Music Foundation and Leonardo.

In conclusion she carried out a SWOT analysis of Economic Engagement, which highlighted its credibility and reputation and its close links with Faculties.

The Chairperson thanked Ms O’Neill for an interesting presentation

11.2 Apologies

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

11.3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

11.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 6 December 2011, were approved.

11.5 Matters Arising

11.5.1 Quality Assurance Agency – Integrated Quality Enhancement Review (minute 10.9 a))

The Deputy Director Support & Development stated that the College had developed an Action Plan to address the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Agency.

11.5.2 College Health Checks (minute 10.5.3)

It was noted that DEL had been advised of the suggestion that targets should be included in tables detailing FLU and Enrolment Outcomes

11.6 Chairperson's Communications

11.6.1 Education and Training Inspectorate Scrutiny Inspection.

The Chairperson advised the Committee that she and Mr McCudden had participated in the ETI Scrutiny Inspection to assess the effectiveness of the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning process in the College. During the feedback session the Inspectors indicated that they had confidence in the College's self-evaluation and quality improvement processes. They identified a number of strengths and highlighted two key areas for improvement:

a) The more effective inclusion and analysis of evaluative, first-hand evidence on the quality of teaching and learning in the whole-college self-evaluation and quality improvement processes; and

b) The provision of clearer evidence of feedback from employers, staff and students to inform the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes.

In response to a query relating to first-hand evidence of the quality of teaching the Deputy Director Support & Development indicated that classroom observation (once every two years) was part of the appraisal process and that the College had established classroom observation, on a voluntary basis, as part of the Improving Quality process. Training was being planned for all managers to ensure that they had the requisite appraisal skills. Referring to feedback from students, Mr Jay suggested that class representatives would provide better feedback on the quality of teaching and learning than Student Council representatives.

11.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted a letter from DEL, dated 20 December 2011, informing the College that the Department has decided to end the requirement for the completion of the Essential Skills Action Plan.

11.8 Funding Learning Unit (FLU) Bid

The Committee received a copy of the College's Funding Learning Unit (FLU) Bid, which had been forwarded to DEL to meet a 24 February 2012 deadline. DEL requires Colleges to bid for the number of FLUs they intend to deliver in the incoming year as this determines the funding received from the Department. The Committee noted that the Bid had been considered and approved by the Finance and General Purposes Committee at its meeting in February 2012. It also noted that a bi-lateral meeting of representatives from DEL and the College had taken place on 8 March 2012 to discuss the bid and to determine the allocation of funding. The College awaits the outcome of the meeting but feels confident that its bid, particularly for an increase in the MASN allocation, would be successful.

The Deputy Director Curriculum informed the Committee that the College had achieved a strong performance against FE targets in 2011/2012 with a projected outcome of 5,200 to 5,300 FLUs against a target of 5,403 FLUs. He said that the College is seeking an increase in its MaSN allocation of 30 places in both 2012/2013 and 2013/2014. The College is also projecting a further increase in part-time HE as more students have difficulty finding local full-time classes.

The Deputy Director provided details of Sector HE Enrolments for 2011/2012 and observed that NRC had the lowest HE full-time FLU allocation in the Sector. This was magnified by the fact that many of the College FLUs were earmarked for lower-weighted courses. If NRC had the same number of HE full-time FLUs as the next lowest college in the Sector, the College would have an additional 239 FLUs generating approximately £790k in additional recurrent grant funding and approximately £210k in additional fees.

The Committee agreed that:

a) The College should mount a campaign involving local politicians with a view to increasing its FLU allocation; and

b) Proposals should be forwarded to the Governing Body.

11.9 Performance Management to Support Continuous Improvement

The Committee received a Report detailing the use of Performance Management to support continuous improvement.

The Deputy Director Support & Development informed the Committee that a Performance Management Workshop had taken place on 2 March 2012 with a view to raising awareness of developments in performance management within NRC, to identify how managers contribute to the performance management culture and to promote the use of core-college MIS data and reports.

The Workshop had considered the way forward for 2012/2013. It also gave consideration to a recent proposal by DEL to impose financial penalties in relation to courses, where the success rate falls into the lower quintile. The Deputy Director Curriculum stated that DEL had provided £1 million for courses with a success rate of less than 20% during 2010/2011 and £1 million for courses across the sector with success rates of 21-40%. Funds would be recovered from courses that did not meet the required success rates.

The Deputy Director Curriculum provided details of NRC courses where the success rate fell below 60% in any given year since 2008/2009. He said that the success rates may be due to low retention or low achievement or a combination of both. In 2008/2009 there were 18 courses listed, which represented 12% of the total final year courses. In 2009/2010 this had decreased to 12 courses representing 8% of the total final year courses. By 2010/2011, only 7 courses fell into this category representing 5% of the total final year courses.

11.10 Whole College Self Evaluation Review (SER)

The Committee noted the Whole College Self Evaluation Review and Quality Improvement Plan, which had been submitted to DEL on 29 February 2012.

The Report consists of three sections, which have been evaluated as follows:

- a) Section A: Leadership and Management (Grade 2 – Very Good);
- c) Section B: Quality of Provision for Learning (Grade 3 – Good); and
- b) Section C: Achievements and Standards (Grade 3 – Good).

The College overall grade has been evaluated internally as Grade 3 (Good).

The Committee also noted the Quality Improvement Plan 2012 to 2013/2014, which had been developed from the Whole College SER. Within each of the seven Quality Improvement areas the key actions and targets have been highlighted; each Quality Improvement area has been linked to key College Strategic Aims.

11.11 Training Improving Quality: Raising Standards (IQRS)

The Committee received the Training IQRS Report. The Deputy Director Support & Development drew attention to a number of sections in the Report providing:

- a) Details of the Background and Structure of NRC;
- b) A Statistical Analysis of NRC Training provision in respect of Skills at Work, Apprenticeships NI, Programme Led Apprenticeships and Work Placements;
- c) A Review of the Quality Improvement Action Plan detailing progress made in relation to key targets set for 2010/2011;
- d) A Self Evaluation Review of Training evaluated under the headings: Leadership and Management; Provision for Learning; and Achievement and Standards; and
- e) A Statistical Analysis of Data 2008/2009 to 2010/2011.

It was noted that this document would be a useful source of information for managers as much of the information was not available on the MIS.

During discussion Members raised a number of issues:

- a) Essential Skills. It was noted that Essential Skills pilot programmes had taken place across NRC in 2010 to improve attendance, motivation, integration and achievement. As a result of these developments, retention, achievement and success data for 2010/2011 shows a substantial improvement in comparison to previous years.
- b) Training Provision. It was noted that NRC occupies a high position (ranked in 10th position) in comparison to all Training Organisations in Northern Ireland.
- c) Performance Through People (PTP). A Member expressed concern that 48% of trainees surveyed at the point of exit said that they had not accomplished the milestones set out in their PTP. Difficulties in obtaining work placements in the current economic climate have had an impact on trainees' ability to achieve and reach their full potential.

The Deputy Director Support and Development indicated that the grades for 2010/11 are to be confirmed.

The Committee approved the document for submission to the Department.

11.12 Investors In People (IIP)

The Committee noted that the Staffing Committee (31 January 2012) had asked for the Education Committee to receive an information copy of the IIP Action Plan. It was further noted that the IIP reassessment is scheduled for 14 May 2012.

11.13 FE College Health Check Report

The Committee received the FE College Health Check Report based on information available at the end of Quarter I of 2011/2012. The report provides a range of information on various key performance indicators from the financial, economic, staffing and learning categories.

The Report has two sections: Part A - NRC Information; and Part B - Sector Comparative Information. The Committee noted that Part A makes a number of comments regarding the College's performance including:

- Staff cost ratios, as a percentage of income, are the highest in the Sector
- Estate costs are below the sector average, which reflects the efforts of College management to make efficiencies
- The College has the second highest diversity of income figure in the sector, demonstrating that it is not as reliant on DEL income as some other colleges
- Overall retention, achievement and success figures show a significant improvement from the previous year and are broadly in line with the sector average.

11.14 Any Other Notified Business

11.14.1 Retirement of Chairperson

The Committee noted that Mrs O'Kane's period of appointment as an NEELB representative on the Governing Body terminates on 2 April 2012 and this would be her last meeting. The Deputy Director Support & Development thanked her for her contribution to the Education Committee and made a small presentation on behalf of the Committee. Mrs O'Kane thanked the Committee, the EMT and the Secretary for their support and commended the EMT on the quality of their papers and presentations.

11.15 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 15 May 2012 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

Una O'Kane, Chairperson

J A Hunter, Secretary