

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 12 October 2010 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O’Kane (Chairperson), Mr R Jay and Mr A Watt.

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

5.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr T Neilands, Mrs C Taylor and Mr K Nelson.

5.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

5.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 1 June 2010, were approved.

5.4 Matters Arising

5.4.1 Interactive White Boards (minute 4.4.2)

The Committee noted that interactive white boards had been installed in the new Skills Centre at the Newtownabbey Campus and staff training had already commenced.

5.4.2 Entitlement Framework (minute 4.5)

The Committee noted that a letter was being prepared for submission to DEL regarding funding to support the new Department of Education/Department for Employment and Learning policy for 2010/2011.

c) Education and Training Inspectorate (minute 4.9 b))

The Governing Body (6 October 2010) received the Report of an Inspection of the Priority Skills Areas at Level 3 and noted that an Action Plan had been forwarded to the Inspectorate during the summer months. The Inspectorate had asked the College to address some areas of improvement in greater detail. The Governing Body agreed that a revised Action Plan should be submitted to the Inspectorate. The Deputy Director Curriculum circulated a copy of the revised Action Plan that had been forwarded to DEL.

5.5 Chairperson’s Communications

5.5.1 Road Accident

The Chairperson reported that Rebecca McManus, a mature student on a full-time HND Social Care course at the Newtownabbey Campus, was killed in a road accident on 7 October 2010. She was in a car with four other students from her class. One of these students is in a

critical condition following the accident. PSNI are currently conducting an investigation into the accident.

The Committee noted that a number of members of staff would be attending the funeral and the Director would be writing to the family to express his condolences.

5.6 Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report.

5.7 Student Enrolment

The Deputy Director Support and Development drew the Committee's attention to the Performance Management spreadsheet, which provides an overview of the target recruitment and associated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for 2010/2011 compared to the actual as at 1 October 2010. She explained that the first step in the compilation of the spreadsheet had been to identify the planned recruitment target for the College by School and type of provision through the College Development Plan (CDP), Funded Learning Unit (FLU) build-up for FE and HE (full-time and part-time) and Essential Skills and Faculty Plans for Economic Engagement and Training. This information was further extended to include a number of other high level KPIs in respect of target and funded FLUs, income, numbers of courses and staff hours. The inclusion of this material helped provide a more detailed insight into the link between recruitment, retention and achievement and financial planning.

Mr Houston and Dr O'Mullan provided a summary of the main issues relating to each type of provision:

a) **Further Education** For 2010/2011 DEL will fund the College for 5368 FLUs in FE; the College's full-time enrolments for 2010/2011 convert to 4363 FLUs at present and the College is predicting 902 part-time FLUs for the year, leaving a potential shortfall of 103 FLUs under target for FE provision. While overall enrolments are slightly down on 2009/2010, this decrease has not been spread evenly across the campuses. Initial indications suggest that the fall in enrolments in Coleraine and Ballymoney are the result of increased competition from schools. The fall in Antrim and Larne reflect the BIP options, while the increase at Newtownabbey may be due to the new building.

b) **Higher Education** The target for full-time HE is expressed in the MaSN cap, which currently stands at 249. Enrolment is currently 276 but it is predicted that it will fall to the MaSN cap by the end of the academic year. The main issue for the College is the lack of scope to develop new HE courses.

c) **Essential Skills** The College's plans are based on achieving 455 FLUs set by DEL.

d) **Training Provision** The actual enrolment for 2010/2011 is down 110 on target. While delivery efficiency of 3,918 staff hours has been affected by course mergers, there has been a reduction in proposed Training income of £359k. Recontracting of the Apprenticeships Northern Ireland and Training for Success provision is expected to be undertaken by March 2011.

e) **Entitlement Framework** This work is funded separately from the FLU system and schools are currently charged £70 per hour for all EF courses. The level of EF work has increased slightly since last year despite the increase in the hourly rate.

f) **Economic Engagement Activity** Each School/Faculty has an economic engagement plan for 2010/2011. The target for 2010/2011 is £734k. Progress of all activity is monitored on a four weekly basis through the College Economic Engagement Committee.

5.8 Student Retention Strategy

The Committee received a copy of the Student Retention Strategy Policy and Procedures. The purpose of the Strategy is to create a framework that will assist the College improve retention across all vocational areas and levels of provision.

The Deputy Director Support and Development stated that the framework for the Strategy focuses on three key interrelated areas all of which relate to the 'total student College experience' and all stages of the learner journey:

a) Stage 1 Student Recruitment. Emphasis is placed on the presentation of clear information and guidance in all marketing material and appropriate pre-entry guidance and support from application to course commencement

The Committee noted that an Admissions Policy was being finalised to inform pre-entry guidance.

b) Stage II A Student Focused Curriculum Design and Delivery. This stage highlights the need to provide: advice in relation to pre-curriculum delivery planning; induction in supporting the learner; the provision of total student experience; assessment of learning; sensitivities in timetabling; maintenance of accurate data; monitoring of attendance; and the maintenance of professional working relationships within the Course Team.

c) Stage III Student Support. Importance is attached to the provision of: a supportive programme and framework; effective liaison with home/college/employer; effective and timely careers information, advice and guidance; appropriate financial advice and guidance; clear guidance on educational and learning support; meeting the needs of the learner by use of assessment and referral mechanisms; student feedback; identification of scope for internal progression; and investigation as to why students 'drop out'.

The Committee noted that a College Attendance Policy was currently being prepared to encourage proactive monitoring of attendance. The links between e-ILP, e-Registers and new tutorial guidelines were also noted.

Dr O'Mullan explained that the Retention Strategy was an all-embracing document, which reflects good practice already in existence at the College. The Strategy would help to spread good practice throughout the College, ensure a standard approach to issues and serve as a mechanism to address retention problems.

In relation to a query Dr O'Mullan advised that all full-time and a substantial number of part-time students had pre-entry interviews to help ensure that they have applied for the correct vocational course at the correct level. Students were interviewed on a group or one-to-one basis. She added that exit interviews were also important as a means of finding out why students leave the College before course completion.

The Committee approved the Student Retention Strategy.

5.8 Annual Report Student Services

Dr O'Mullan presented the Annual Report Student Services for the Academic Year 2009/1010. She highlighted the following areas detailed in the Report:

a) **Student Support Funds.** A new centralised service is available operating out of Trostan Avenue. Payments may be made out of the Hardship Funds (Discretionary) to provide assistance for students in particular financial hardship. During the year 139 students were assisted; total support funds expenditure amounted to £156k leaving a surplus of £462k to carryover to 2010/2011. It was noted that the very precise nature of DEL Guidelines restricted the allocation of funds from this source.

- b) **Additional Support Funds.** Students with learning difficulties or disabilities may be given additional human or technical support. Additional Support Funds amounting to £242k were allocated to 256 students.
- c) **Care to Learn.** The Scheme addresses the need to provide childcare support for parents aged under 20 at the start of their course of study in FE provision. Care to Learn expenditure amounted to £66k for 20 students.
- d) **Safeguarding.** An annual summary report provided details of cases referred by staff to Designated and Deputy Designated Officers.
- e) **Student Discipline.** An annual summary report provided details of disciplinary cases across the College.

During discussion Members raised a number of observations concerning the Student Disciplinary section. Queries were made concerning the number of dismissals, the penalty for threatening violence with a knife and the absence of an appeal column from the table detailing disciplinary cases. **The Deputy Director Support and Development undertook to investigate these issues and report back to the Committee**

5.10 Education Committee Action Plan 2010/2011

The Committee received a copy of the draft Education Committee Action Plan for 2010/2011, which had been produced to enable the Committee to review its effectiveness at the final meeting of the academic year on 7 June 2011.

Members of the Committee were of the view that the Action Plan needed a number of adjustments:

- a) Three sections dealing with the monitoring of performance should be combined;
- b) The Committee should be leading, guiding and recommending as well as monitoring activities;
- c) The Action Plan should include reference to the student experience; and
- c) The template used for the Action Plan is limited and should be revised.

The Committee agreed that the Deputy Director Curriculum, the Deputy Director Support and Development and the Secretary should give further consideration to the Committee Action Plan and report to the December meeting.

It was noted that the Governing Body had expressed a wish for the Education Committee to receive a presentation from the Faculty of the Built Environment and Design. It was suggested that the presentation should highlight: trends in FE, HE, EF and EE and Training in the Faculty; KPIs; and strategic concerns. In response to a query by the Chairperson, Dr O'Mullan stated that presentations, also allowed Faculties the opportunity to raise their profiles in relation to economic engagement activities.

5.11 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further notified business to report the meeting concluded at 8.00 pm.

5.12 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that the next scheduled meeting would be on Tuesday 7 December 2010 at 5.30 pm at the Farm Lodge Campus, Ballymena.

Una O’Kane, Chair

J A Hunter, Secretary