

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 11 January 2011 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O'Kane (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands, Mr J Cromie, Ms C Taylor and Mr A Watt.

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

6.1 Faculty Presentation

Mr Ronnie Lavery, the Head of Faculty Built Environment and Design gave a presentation regarding the work of his Faculty. At the outset he provided an overview of the Faculty in terms of its staff and student strength; he advised the Committee that the Faculty had 57 FT Lecturers, 34 PT Lecturers and 14 Support Staff and 330 FT FE Students, 437 PT Students, 24 FT HE Students and 67 PT HE Students. He also indicated that the Faculty had 570 trainees and 508 Entitlement Framework Students.

Mr Lavery proceeded to carry out a SWOT analysis of the Faculty:

- Faculty Strengths. Among the strengths he emphasised were staff expertise and skills, satisfactory recruitment to FE and HE programmes, economic engagement partnerships, School Learning Community partnerships and student retention and achievement.
- Weaknesses. Mr Lavery drew attention to staff turnover mentioning in particular the loss of three young, experienced staff to the University of Ulster. He expressed regret at the decline in recruitment in Construction Training.
- Opportunities. He made reference to a number of new technologies, green developments and RSM and Interreg Projects, which offered exciting opportunities for the Faculty.
- Threats. He referred to the economic downturn, which has had an impact on recruitment especially to Construction Training. He also made mention of the decline in apprenticeships and in electrical installation and plumbing.

In conclusion he said that there were several challenges facing the Faculty such as the need for quality improvement, the standardisation of course delivery across campuses, recontracting for training provision, and the maintenance of employer links to facilitate apprenticeships, work placements and industrial placements.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Lavery for an informative presentation

6.2 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr R Jay and Mr K Nelson.

6.3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

6.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 12 October 2010, were approved subject to some adjustments to the numbering of minutes and to the venue of the meeting.

6.5 Matters Arising

6.5.1 Entitlement Framework (minute 5.4.2)

The Director reported that the new Department of Education/Department for Employment and Learning Entitlement Framework document has still not materialised. He advised that it would be inopportune to take any action until the document is published and considered by the Education Committee.

6.5.2 Student Discipline Table Annual Report from Student Services (minute 5.8)

The Committee (12 October 2010) raised a number of observations regarding the Disciplinary Section of the Annual Report Student Services. Responding to these comments Dr O'Mullan stated that the disciplinary case, involving the threat of violence with a knife, had occurred in the catering area and had been dealt with appropriately. Referring to the data regarding disciplinary appeals she advised that next year's report would include an 'appeals column' in the table detailing disciplinary cases.

6.5.3 Recontracting for Apprenticeships Northern Ireland and Training for Success (minute 5,7 d)

Dr O'Mullan provided an update on the College's tender for the DEL Training Contract. She said that the tender document had to be uploaded to CPD by 17 January 2011. She added that it would be a two-stage process: Stage 1 Selection Criteria (February 2011) and Stage 2 Award of Contract (June 2011). She advised that the College's submission would be similar to the current training provision; NRC would be tendering for AppsNI and TfS. She explained that the tender would be across 9 Council Areas (Moyle to Newtownabbey) and 4 boundary Council Areas. The only exception to this would be for the areas of Rail Engineering and Heavy Vehicle where NRC was submitting a 26 Council Area tender. The College had declined an invitation to subcontract to managing agents such as ETT, PMST and ETS in line with the Sector approach.

The Director emphasised that the tender submission was not pre-empting the Governing Strategic Planning Workshop, where consideration would be given to related strategic curriculum issues.

6.6 Chairperson's Communications

The Director reported that Dr Brian Hill, Head of School Engineering & Science had been awarded an MBE in the New Year Honours List for services to Further Education and Training. The Chairperson forwarded her congratulations, on behalf of the Committee, to Dr Hill on this award, which reflected favourably not only on the recipient but also on the College.

6.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Employment and Learning, dated 22 December 2010, advising that the Department had secured an additional £1.2m for allocation to Further Education Colleges through the recurrent block grant. The College has been allocated £119,695 for FE FLUs and £104,906 for ES FLUs.

The Director advised that it would be necessary to amend the FLU targets in light of this additional allocation. He said that the matter would be addressed by the Governing Body at its meeting on 12 January 2011.

6.8 Quality Improvement Update

The Committee received a Quality Improvement update from the Deputy Director Support and Development. She informed members that as well as the Priority Skills Area Level 2 Follow-Up Inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate, the College had been involved in a number of other small- scale inspections, surveys and quality initiatives from September 2010:

- a) Electrical Training Trust Inspection. Although NRC was not being inspected it complied with ETT's request to facilitate the inspection as a partner delivering directed training. Feedback from eti was positive;
- b) Engineering Training Council Inspection. Feedback from the inspectors was positive;
- c) Worked Based Learning/Essential Skills. Ms C O'Neill, Head of Economic Engagement met with Mrs L Warren eti to discuss a paper regarding the relationship between the Economic Engagement Department and the Essential Skills School Team.
- d) Blended Learning Pilot. Feedback was very positive from the two programmes evaluated: the Foundation Degree in Retail and the Foundation Degree Sports Exercise and Fitness;
- e) Financial Audit and Support Team Outcomes – NRC Training. FAST reports have been circulated to the Audit Committee and Governing Body. Training administration was highlighted as low risk. Some recovery of funds was actioned in respect of students overpaid during the summer months.

Dr O'Mullan advised the Committee that preparations are ongoing for the following:

- a) Level 3 Follow-Up Inspection. *Eti* will primarily focus on the Built Environment;
- b) Quality Assurance Agency Review Higher Education. The QAA Integrated Enhancement Review, first stage, will take place in Autumn 2011;
- c) Cultural Diversity Survey. Phase Two of this *eti* survey will take place during 2010/2011;
- d) Admissions and Guidance Survey. Phase Two of the Survey will take place during 2010/2011;
- e) Edexcel Quality Review and Development. A review of the College Quality Assurance arrangements is due to take place on 16 December 2010. The College is at present working to identify Lead Internal Verifiers and to make amendments to quality processes to meet the new Edexcel requirements.

A Member suggested that some members of staff were suffering from inspection fatigue such as the frequency of inspections. The Director advised that the College is awaiting details of the new inspection model for the Sector, which would involve the complete inspection of all FE provision in two colleges each year. The Chairperson questioned whether there was a link between the frequency and depth of inspections and quality improvement.

6.9 Student Council

The Student President presented the Student Council Report, which provided:

- a) An overview of Student Council activities during 2009/2010. The Report gives details of elections, officer training, promotional publications, enhanced facilities, banking service, attendance at College events and Christian Union activities;

b) Student Council Projections 2010/2011. The Student Council has produced an Action Plan for 2010/2011, which highlights the key activities planned for 2010/2011. The Committee noted that the Student Council works closely with the Quality Improvement Unit and has regular meetings to discuss student issues, student survey feedback and the Student Voice.

c) Structure of Student Council. The Report provides details of the structure of the Student Council and of the Student Education and Welfare Officers.

The Committee noted that this was only the second year of the Student Council and it acknowledged that the Council had made substantial efforts to raise the awareness of its work and its role in the Student Voice.

The Director said that he was impressed with the leadership given by the Student President and his Deputies. He added that Mr Cromie had set a good example as Student President and had enhanced the status of the office.

6.10 Performance of NRC Curriculum and Associated Provision

At the outset of the presentation Mr Houston defined retention, success and achievement rates. The achievement rate was the least understood; it represents the percentage of students, who were enrolled in the year of entry and who completed the programme and achieved the full target qualification.

Members were reminded that a Report on Key Performance Indicators for NRC Curriculum and Associated Provision had been presented to the Education Committee in June 2010, which reported on retention, achievement and success for the academic year 2008/2009. The 2009/2010 Report gives an overview of performance for 2009/2010 and provides a comparison between both years. Retention has improved in over 75% of the Sector Subject Areas (SSAs); success rates have risen in approximately 50% of SSAs; and achievement rates have improved in approximately 70% of the SSAs.

Dr O'Mullan stated that there had also been a significant increase in retention on all Training strands from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010 despite the current economic crisis. Retention has risen to 91.5% overall, which is ahead of the internal target, 75%. The poor outcome in the Programme Led Apprenticeships has distorted the overall achievement figure for 2009/2010 (50% overall). It is anticipated, however, that rates for 2010/2011 should be at least equal to those of 2009/2010.

She provided details of Economic Engagement KPIs for both years. 52 Companies were engaged in courses in 2009/2010 compared with 28 Companies in 2008/2009. £343,172 was generated as gross income from courses in 2009/2010, an increase of £150k on the previous year. During 2009/2010 nine international activities were recorded, an increase on the two activities reported in 2008/2009. NRC is working with other Colleges to agree and refine a reporting mechanism for PSA Target (19a) for economic engagement.

Mr Houston provided statistics regarding retention, success and achievement rates for Entitlement Framework courses for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. He said that there had been a marked improvement in all areas during 2009/2010 and drew attention to the high achievement rates ranging from 75% to 95%.

The Committee considered it important to share data in relation to retention, success and achievement rates with all members of staff. It was also crucial to provide this information in clear, explicit terms to Members of the Governing Body.

The Chairperson questioned what action was being taken in regard to under-performing teams. She was assured that strenuous efforts were being made to embed good practice throughout the College.

Referring to the statistics Dr O'Mullan stressed that the College was in the early stages of the collation of information. In future reports would become more refined and selective, and capable of highlighting SSAs, which do not achieve their targets.

The Committee noted that the Performance Management Spreadsheet of 26 October 2010 had highlighted FLU, Training and other income targets as KPIs relating to curriculum and associated provision. These KPIs can also be monitored in-year and a correlation made between retention levels and FLUs, EF income and Training income to assist in monitoring budgetary performance and to inform strategic planning.

Dr O'Mullan also stated that MIS is tailoring its data for Training so that retention can be analysed at the same point in time as FE and HE.

6.11 Education Committee Action Plan 2010/2011

The Chairperson reminded Members that the Committee (12 October 2010) had given consideration to 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.

The Committee noted that the Plan required a number of adjustments and 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.

The Committee considered and agreed a revised Plan. The Chairperson suggested that future Action Plans should include a section relating to the professional development of Members of the Committee.

6.12 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further notified business to report the meeting concluded at 7.45 pm.

6.13 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that the next scheduled meeting would be on Tuesday 8 February 2011 at 5.30 pm at the Farm Lodge Campus, Ballymena.

Una O'Kane, Chairperson

J A Hunter, Secretary