

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 15 March 2011 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O’Kane (Chairperson), Mr R Jay, Mrs C Taylor

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

7.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr T Neilands, Mr J Cromie, Mr K Nelson and Mr A Watt.

7.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

7.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

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

7.4 Matters Arising

7.4.1 Recontracting for Apprenticeships Northern Ireland and Training for Success (minute 6.5.3)

The Chair reminded Members that recontracting was a two-stage process: Stage 1 Selection Criteria and Stage 2 Award of Contract (June 2011). Dr O’Mullan informed the Committee that there had been no formal notification regarding Stage 1

7.5 Chairperson’s Communications

There were no communications from the Chairperson.

7.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

- a) Two letters, dated 18 January and 28 January 2011, have been received from the Department for Employment and Learning regarding Centres of Excellence: and
- b) The College’s response to DEL, dated 11 February 2011, concerning these letters.

The Committee noted that in the past DEL had designated Centres of Excellence in various Colleges on the successful submission for ear-marked funds aligned with a Grade 1 (Excellent) under the old grading system. NRC has two Centres of Excellence, one in Construction and one in Manufacturing Engineering.

It was also noted that following the recent focussed inspection of Priority Skills at Level 3 Manufacturing Engineering was awarded a new Grade 2 (Very Good) and Construction a Grade 4 (Satisfactory). The Director has written to DEL to state that the College was unaware that the Level 3 inspection grade would be used to reassess Centres of Excellence, as it is not a comprehensive, dedicated inspection. A reply from DEL is awaited.

A Member commented on the poor communication from DEL regarding the relationship between the PSA inspection and Centre of Excellence status.

The Chairperson asked for this matter to be addressed by the Governing Body

7.7 FLU Planning

The Committee received a report prepared by the Deputy Director Curriculum concerning FLU Planning. The Committee noted:

a) Revised FLU Plan 2010/2011. In January 2011 DEL had extra funds to distribute so colleges were asked to revise their FLU Plan 2010/2011 to take account of this – NRC received further funding equivalent to 35 FLUs and the NRC revised bid was for 6,493 FLUs: Further Education 5,403 FLUs; Essential Skills 487 FLUs; and Higher Education 603 FLUs.

Mr Houston informed the Committee that full-time FE recruitment had held up well during 2010/2011 and looked likely to exceed the original target by approximately 47 FLUs.

Mr Houston said that projected part-time FLUs were down by 195 on the original target and this was the main reason why NRC had not achieved its FE 5,403 FLU target. He explained that the decrease in part-time recruitment had resulted from the College's decision to restrict the number of non-vocational classes. Furthermore the College was mindful of keeping its leisure provision in check as DEL allows only up to 5% of the total FE FLUs for this provision. The announcement of the closure of the Antrim Campus, the demise of the construction industry and the contraction of community provision had also had a detrimental effect on part-time recruitment. Mr Houston stated that the College intended to expand its part-time provision in 2011/2012 and was confident that it could achieve its target

b) FLU Bid 2011/2012. Mr Houston explained that the deadline for the submission of the FLU Bid 2011/2012 to DEL was 24 February 2011. He said that the bid would now be subject to discussion at the bi-lateral meeting between the Chair of the Governing Body and the Director and DEL officials on 16 March 2011.

NRC has bid for 6,509 FLUs: Further Education 5,400 FLUs; Essential Skills 487 FLUs; and Higher Education 622 FLUs. 6,509 FLUs: Further Education 5,400 FLUs; Essential Skills 487 FLUs; and Higher Education 622 FLUs. ES is in reality not a bid as the Department gives the College an ES target to deliver.

Mr Houston advised that the demand for full-time and part-time courses appears to be sufficient to support the FLU bid for 2011/12 but the College will need to be more effective, particularly in regard to part-time courses, in converting this demand into enrolments.

Mr Houston provided information in relation to the HE and Essential Skills Bids. Referring to HE, he said that the College was unable to cope with demands; as a consequence the College had increased its bid from 603 to 622 FLUs in 2011/2012. DEL had suggested an increase in the ES bid from 487 to 510.

7.8 Whole College Self Evaluation Review and Quality Improvement Process

The Committee received a copy of the updated whole College Self Evaluation Review and Quality Improvement Plan, which had been submitted to DEL to meet a deadline of 24 February 2011.

It was noted that the Report consisted of four sections, which had been evaluated as follows:

- a) Section A: Leadership and Management (Grade 3 – Good);
- b) Section B: Achievements and Standards (Grade 4 – Satisfactory);
- c) Section C: Quality of Provision for Learning (Grade 3 – Good); and

d) Section D: Use of Information Learning Technology (Grade 3 – Good).

Dr O'Mullan said that the College overall grade had been evaluated internally as Grade 3 (Good). She stated that substantial progress had been made but there was still much work to be done to enhance the delivery of high quality teaching and learning and progress the monitoring of performance management.

During discussion members made a number of observations regarding the content of the document:

a) Appraisal Process. It was noted that the current staff appraisal system was limited in terms of monitoring staff performance in the classroom and needed to be supplemented by peer observation and student feedback.

b) Effective Communication. One of the strengths of the College was the effective communication between the Governing Body and senior staff.

c) Essential Skills. Reference was made to the modest success and achievement rates within Essential Skills. Mr Houston advised that the College would endeavour to improve retention rates during 2011/2012, which would lead to improvements in the success and achievement rates.

d) IT, ICT and Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL). There was a need to support and encourage innovation in the use of IT, ICT and TEL across all areas of the College. A number of CPD events dealing with IT, ICT and TEL have been and would continue to be organised throughout the College.

The Committee endorsed the College's submission to the Department.

7.9 Training - Improving Quality: Raising Standards

The Committee received a copy of the annual IQ:RS return. Dr O'Mullan advised the Committee that the format accorded with the revised layout prescribed by DEL. She drew attention to the following sections

a) NRC Background Information. The Chair expressed the view that the sub-section on Strategic Aims should be adjusted to indicate that NRC's strategic aims are set by the Governing Body and the Executive Management Team.

b) Statistical Analysis of NRC Training Provision. In response to a query regarding poor progression rates, Dr O'Mullan advised that one of the main reasons was the poor achievement rates of the Essential Skills cohort.

c) Review of Action Plan from 2008/2009 IQ:RS.

d) IQ:RS Sections on Leadership and Management, Achievement and Standards and Quality of Provision for Learning.

e) NRC IQ:RS Grading. Dr O'Mullan informed the Committee that this was a desk-top evaluation but that the College had had to align itself with the standards and gradings associated with an *eti* inspection. The Committee noted that an overall grade of 3 (good) had been proposed.

f) Quality Improvement Plan 2010/2011 as developed from IQ:RS 2009/1010. The Committee noted that one of the targets to address Quality Improvement was the achievement of Training Quality Standard (TQS) by December 2011.

The Committee agreed that the document be approved for submission to DEL

7.10 Quality Improvement Update

The Committee received a Quality Improvement update, which highlighted the following areas:

a) Centres of Excellence in Construction and Manufacturing Engineering. This topic has been covered in detail at minute 7.6 above.

b) Training Quality Standard (TQS). TQS is the quality kitemark that has been heavily promoted across the FE Sector in England and Wales and is used by the Centres of Vocational Excellence. DEL is keen that this standard will ultimately replace the Centres of Excellence model in Northern Ireland. DEL has agreed to pay the registration and assessment fees associated with the TQS of up to £5k per college before the end of March 2011. Dr O'Mullan stated that the College intended to register by 31 March 2011 and submit an application by December 2011.

The Committee expressed the view that it was critical to provide employers with details of this quality kitemark. It suggested that Colleges Northern Ireland should be asked to address this matter.

c) ETI Interim Follow-up Inspection in Construction Priority Skills Area Level 3. **Eti** has indicated that overall satisfactory progress has been made against the areas for improvement. The Inspectorate made reference to the excellent start that had been made in regard to the sharing of good practice among staff. The Inspectorate also referred to the high quality of service being offered to Schools by the Coleraine staff in the delivery of the Entitlement Framework.

d) Delivering Excellence. In April 2010 DEL allocated £795,000 to the six Colleges for four projects previously delivered/facilitated by LSDA (NI):

- (i) Student Learning Difficulties and Disabilities;
- (ii) Essential Skills;
- (iii) College Industry Initiative; and
- (iv) Leadership and Management

e) Quality Improvement. NRC has agreed to participate in a DEL funded QI pilot to consider the impact of using a range of teaching and learning and quality initiatives over a short time period. Built Environment National Diploma has been identified as the area to be piloted.

f) Staff Development Days. Two successful College Staff Development Days were held on 17 and 18 February 2011. On 17 February some 300 staff attended a wide range of workshops; 18 February was specifically for vocational teams to share best practice and to continue work on standardisation approaches. Feedback from staff has been positive.

7.11 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further notified business to report the meeting concluded at 7.15 pm.

7.12 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that the next scheduled meeting would be on Tuesday 7 June 2011 at 5.30 pm at the Farm Lodge Campus, Ballymena.

Una O’Kane, Chairperson

J A Hunter, Secretary