

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 7 June 2011 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O'Kane (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands, Mr R Jay,
Mr K Nelson and Mrs C Taylor.

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

8.1 Apologies

An apology was received from Mr A Watt.

8.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

8.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 15 March 2011, were approved.

8.4 Matters Arising

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

The Deputy Director Support & Development reminded Members that recontracting was a two-stage process: Stage 1 Selection Criteria and Stage 2 Award of Contract. She informed the Committee that the College had been successful in Stage 1 and was awaiting the outcome of Stage II. She advised the Committee that DEL had extended the present contract until the end of August 2011.

8.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no communications from the Chairperson.

8.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted a Circular from DEL, dated 4 May 2011, which sets out terms and conditions for the payment of the Hardship Fund (Discretionary) from 1 August 2011. A Member drew attention to two aspects of the Report: the requirement for the Governing Body to monitor the demands for funds and the operation of the system in place; and Governing Body representation on the Hardship Fund Committee and Panel. The Deputy Director Support & Development reminded Members that the Annual Report Student Services already provides details of the operation of the Hardship Fund. She was of the view that the document was only making proposals in relation to Governing Body monitoring and representation roles.

The Committee agreed that the Director should raise this matter at a future meeting of the Directors' Group.

8.7 Education Committee Action Plan and Annual Report.

The Committee noted:

a) Education Committee Action Plan. The Education Committee, at its meeting on 12 October 2010, agreed an Action Plan to enable it to review its effectiveness at the final meeting of the academic year. The Committee considered its Action Plan 2010/2011 with added comments to enable it to review its effectiveness. **It was agreed that the Committee had had a busy time during 2011/2012 and had met its objectives.**

b) Education Committee Annual Report. It was noted that the Education Committee is required to submit an Annual Report summarising its activities to the Governing Body. The Committee **considered and approved its Annual Report 2010/2011 for submission to the Governing Body.**

The Chairperson expressed the view that the business of the Committee was sometimes more passive than active. She expressed a wish for some means of monitoring and comparing achievements of Faculties and Schools internally and to benchmarking them against the Sector. This material could then be used to inform the Committee Action Plan. The Chairperson said that she would like Faculties and Schools to be aware that the Committee was taking an active interest in their work and that they would be invited to attend meetings to tell the Committee about their successes and challenges.

The Director and Deputy Directors assured the Committee that the College could provide an overview of Faculty and School retention, success and achievement at the next meeting. It could prove difficult, however, to obtain appropriate benchmarking data from the Sector. The Director stated that it was difficult to make meaningful comparisons with the Sector as Colleges organise their curriculum in different ways. Colleges are currently having discussions with DEL to ensure comparative statistics are available in 2011/2012.

8.8 Quality Improvement Update

The Committee received a Quality Improvement Report, which highlighted the following issues:

a) eti Surveys and Reports. The following evaluations have taken place in recent weeks:

i) Phase 2 of the NRC Blended Learning Pilot Project. The Report identifies strengths and weaknesses in regard to the blended learning pilot project. It was noted that the Report made mention of the need for students to have access to appropriate technology. The chairperson indicated that this should be a priority issue. The Deputy Director Curriculum stated that the College had installed new equipment over the past year but there was still variation from campus to campus. As soon as wi-fi technology is installed students will be allowed to bring their own laptops; those without laptops will still be provided with access to equipment..

ii) Phase 2 of NRC Admissions, Guidance and Support Survey. The Inspectorate met a range of staff and students involved with admissions, guidance and support.

iii) College Self-Evaluation Report and Quality Improvement Plan 2011/2012. The Report concludes that the College demonstrates many strengths in its use of self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes to enhance and inform improvement in provision.

iv) Phase 2 Cultural Diversity. The Inspectorate spoke to Members of the Student Council, held a focus group with staff, a focus group with students and met a range of staff to evaluate the embedding of cultural diversity and equality of opportunity in all aspects of College life. The Report indicates the College's main strengths and the main areas for improvement.

b) Preparation for Whole College Inspection. It was noted that the focus of the forthcoming Whole College Inspection would be based on the revised IQRS 2010. The Deputy Director Support & Development advised the Committee that the wider College Management Team and a range of support managers and administrators had received a briefing from the Head of Quality Improvement on the experience of participation in the first Whole College Inspection at SERC. It was noted that whilst the quality of teaching and learning is paramount, there would also be an emphasis on data. A holistic approach to the quality of the student experience is expected.

c) Associate Inspector Appointments. Two new Associated Inspectors have been appointed from NRC staff: Dr Brenda McKay-Redmond and Ms Phyllis Kane.

d) QAA – Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review – Developmental Engagement. Work is underway to collate the College Self Evaluation Document and Student Written Statement for QAA (July 2011). The NRC Developmental Engagement will take place during the week commencing 17 October 2011.

e) IIP Update. The Director informed the Committee that he had received oral feedback in relation to the award of Investors In People. It would appear that the College had some additional work to do before the full award could be made. Reference was made, for example, to the importance of consistent communication throughout the organisation. A written report would be issued in the near future. The Chairperson questioned the feasibility of one assessor undertaking an initial assessment of an organisation the size of the Northern Regional College. She considered it would be important for the College to offer feedback on this issue. The Director stated that he would await the receipt of the written report and would consult the Head of the Quality Improvement regarding this matter.

Asked whether the College should seek to achieve the IIP award, the Director said that the IIP award was a useful device to measure the College against IIP criteria. It would also provide an external acknowledgement of the quality of what was happening in the College.

f) FAST/Monitoring Visit Information. Quality and Performance Branch (QPB) of DEL carried out a monitoring review of NRC's contract Training for Success, Programme Led Apprenticeships and Apprenticeship NI provision in March 2011. The College has forwarded a response to DEL regarding a number of areas of minor compliance indicated in the QPB report.

8.9 Performance Management - Curriculum

The Committee received a Report on Performance Management, which detailed a number of KPIs for key aspects of College business. With regard to curriculum and the associated provision the main KPIs are retention, success and achievement. The development of MIS and TMS data reports have facilitated monitoring of curriculum KPIs during the academic year 2010/2011.

a) Student Retention on Full-Time FE and HE. The report noted the retention targets for 2011/2012 for full-time FE by curriculum school. By way of comparison historic average figures for the past 3 or 4 years were provided. If retention is increased the College's FLU target can be achieved with fewer courses thus reducing costs. It was noted that targets for success would be available at the next meeting.

b) Training. Regular 4-weekly monitoring of retention within the various strands of AppsNI and TfS across Schools and Faculties has been undertaken in 2010/2011. This information, along with data for retention in 2008/2009 and 2009/2010, was considered when setting a target for retention for 2011/2011. A similar approach was taken when considering a target for success. As a result a target of 80% retention and a 55% success has been proposed for 2011/2012. It was noted that a target of 50% has been set for the KPI work placement rate

c) Economic Engagement: There was a planned increase in the level of all aspects of economic engagement activity across the College during 2010/2011. The Committee noted that KPIs by Faculty and by College were being monitored on a 4-weekly basis. The Committee noted a number of tables showing Faculty and School performance against Economic Engagement KPIs. This information is monitored on a four-weekly basis and checked by the Head of Faculty/Head of School with the Economic Engagement Officer. Referring to the tabular information, the Chairperson suggested that a short commentary on each table would be helpful in the interpretation of the data.

d) Performance Management – Planning for 2011/2012. The process of performance management, started last academic year, has been developed and refined as part of the strategic planning for curriculum and associated provision for 2011/2012. The staff utilisation target for delivery is 97%. The proposed training income and Output Related Funding (ORF) are directly aligned to the target KPIs of 80% retention and 55% success. It is anticipated that the higher retention and success rates will have a positive impact on FLUs.

8.10 Any Other Notified Business

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

8.11 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that this was the last meeting of the Education Committee during the academic year 2010/2011. The next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 11 October 2011 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

The Chairperson thanked members for their contribution to the work of the Committee during 2010/2011. She also thanked the Director and the Deputy Directors for their valuable inputs and the Secretary for his high quality support.

Una O’Kane, Chair

J A Hunter, Secretary