

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

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

Present Mrs U O’Kane (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands,
Mr R Jay and Mr K Nelson

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Student Services and Marketing Presentation

The Committee received a presentation from Mrs Jenny McKay, Head of Student Support & Marketing. At the outset she detailed the five constituent sections of her Department: Admissions & Information; Student Support; Marketing; Learning Resources; and Catering. She provided an overview of developments, key achievements and challenges in regard to these sections. She made no comments regarding Catering, as it was currently under review.

She mentioned the development of a multi-skilled, flexible staff as one of the Department’s main achievements. She also referred to the development of a standardised admission system, the implementation of Version 4 of QLS and the introduction of a more effective reprographic management system. She indicated that the Department had had considerable success in regard to financial control with every section coming in under budget during 2010/2011.

In conclusion she stated that the main challenges facing her Department during 2011/2012 were in the areas of: Performance Management; Budget Management; Campus Rationalisation; and e-Developments.

During discussion Members raised a number of queries concerning the management of the diverse portfolio of the Department, the provision of careers advice and the measurement of Marketing KPIs. In response Mrs McKay explained that despite the apparent disparate nature of the Department there were close links between sections. Marketing, for example, was closely linked with recruitment and admissions. She advised that the Department recruited professional careers staff rather than using academic staff as in the past. She indicated that the number of media hits was used to measure Marketing activities and effectiveness and student feedback was used to ascertain perceptions of FE and HE; a focus group was currently operating in schools to ascertain the views of young persons in regard to these issues.

The Chairperson thanked Mrs McKay for a succinct and interesting presentation.

9.1 Membership of Committee

a) It was noted that the revised Membership of the Committee was as follows: Ms S Cassidy, Mr J Jay, Mr T Neilands, Mr K Nelson, Mrs U O’Kane and Mr A Watt;

b) **The Committee agreed that Mrs U O’Kane be appointed as Chairperson and Mr K Nelson as Vice Chairperson.** It was noted that Mrs O’Kane’s period of office, as an Education and Library representative, terminates on 2 April 2012 and it would be necessary for the Secretary to seek an extension to the period of office of both Mrs O’Kane and Rev Jamieson, who is also an ELB representative to the Governing Body.

c) The Committee reviewed its Terms of Reference and discussed whether staff development should be included under the remit of the Education Committee or the Staffing Committee. **It was agreed that this matter should be clarified in conjunction with the Chair of the**

Staffing Committee and that the Terms of Reference should be approved and forwarded to the Governing Body.

9.2 Apologies

An apology was received from Ms S Cassidy and Mr A Watt.

9.3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

9.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 7 June 2011, were approved.

9.5 Matters Arising

9.5.1 Investors In People (minute 8.8e))

The Director queried whether the Education or the Staffing Committee should consider the IIP award. **It was agreed that both Committees should give consideration to this matter from their particular perspectives at their next meetings.**

9.6 Chairperson's Communications

There were no communications from the Chairperson.

9.7 Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

a) College Health Check, 3rd Quarter 2010/2011, issued by DEL on 29 September 2011. The report provides a range of information on various key performance indicators from the financial, economic, staffing and learning categories. It also allows each College to monitor its performance against other Colleges, both on an individual and on a sector-wide basis.

The Director advised the Committee that there were issues in relation to the data used by DEL in compiling the Report; there were discrepancies between the statistics provided by colleges and those provided by DEL. A forthcoming meeting has been arranged between College and DEL representatives to discuss this matter.

The Director also mentioned that there was a perception that DEL was undertaking the Governing Body role in terms of performance management. It was hoped that the forthcoming Review of Governance would help to clarify roles and responsibilities of DEL and Governing Bodies.

The Deputy Director Curriculum confirmed that the College had reservations regarding the data but pointed out that the Report provided useful information in relation to trends. Although the Report states that the overall retention, achievement and success figures for NRC are below the sector average, HE and Full-time FE are above the sector average. He said that the gap between NRC performance and that of the sector in respect of part-time FE and Essential Skills was not as wide as shown in the Report. In response to a query Mr Houston stated that the integrated approach to teaching Essential Skills had raised performance in some Colleges, as had good follow-up procedures. He advised that a new strategy was in place, which would lead to an improvement in results. Course teams have now agreed retention, achievement and success targets, which would be monitored closely.

The Chairperson raised concerns regarding the handling of this information should it reach the media. She stressed the necessity of the College having an appropriate strategy in place.

The Committee noted that the majority of the ETI inspections in Priority Skills Level 2 in 2009 and Priority Skills Level 3 in 2010 had been graded 3 (good). In two instances areas graded 4 had been upgraded in follow-up inspections. The Director stated that the College must aspire to higher grades 1 or 2 and that it must be more proactive particularly to routine inspections. He added that the College received no plaudits for mediocrity; although performance in HE and part-time FE were above average, it was the overall total indicating that the College was below the sector average that received attention.

Mr Jay suggested that Targets should be included in the Table detailing FLU and Enrolment Outcomes. He suggested that DEL should be informed of this omission as it had asked Colleges to let it have comments regarding the Report.

b) Circular FE 13/11, issued by DEL on 8 August 2011 providing information and guidance on funding blended learning in the 2011/2012 academic year. The Committee noted that any college engaged in the delivery of blended learning must adhere to a number of conditions: Lecturers must have attained, or be following, the Technology in Learning Delivery (TLD); all blended learning must be recorded on the Northern Ireland College Information System (NICIS); and colleges must advise DEL in advance of the FLU funded provision that they plan to deliver in this way. The e-learning project has an overarching objective for the six colleges to achieve embedded status by September 2011.

c) Correspondence from DEL, dated 19 September 2011, regarding the alignment of requirements to teach Essential Skills with those for mainstream Further Education lecturers. It was noted that recruitment would become more difficult as a higher level of qualifications would now be required for full-time and part-time Essential Skills lecturers/tutors.

9.8 Recruitment Performance

The Committee received a paper providing details of student enrolment in 2011/2012:

a) Further Education. There have been 3194 full-time FE enrolments against a target of 3428 for 2011/2012. The dip in enrolments was caused by increased competition from schools and a decrease in the number of students returning for their 2nd year. The Director advised the Committee that the closure of the Antrim campus had not been a factor in the lower than expected recruitment, as the closure had resulted in a net loss of only 14 students.

b) Higher Education. The College has reached its MaSN cap, which currently stands at 252. It was noted that NRC has the lowest number of HE places in the sector and that the College would be making a stronger case for additional HE places. The Director indicated that he had raised this matter at the Annual Accountability meeting with the Permanent Secretary earlier in the day.

c) Essential Skills. The FLU target for Essential Skills is set by DEL alone.

d) Entitlement Framework. There have been 2446 enrolments and the College has now met its target of 2400 students for 2011/2012. Indications are that the College will generate an income of £1.76m during 2011/2012.

e) Training Provision. The new intake enrolments are down 76 on target and this is largely in the area of Built Environment. It was noted that the trend in the decline in total enrolments is related to a number of strategic decisions as well as to the approach taken by Level 3 contract holders, Electrical Training Trust (ETT) and the Plumbing and Mechanical Services Trust (PMST), to prioritise their new sub-contractor for work and to direct students to their new facility in Belfast. Targets for Retention and Success for the Training programme have been set at 82% and 55% respectively for 2011/2012. An initial analysis of the data for 2010/2011 shows 89% for retention and the success rates are still not available.

A Member suggested that it would have been helpful to have had a standard paper on recruitment for both the Governing Body and the Education Committee as both meetings were within one week of each other.

9.9 Annual Report Student Services 2010/2011

The Committee received the Annual Report Student Services 2010/2011, in which the following issues were raised:

- a) Hardship Funds. 113 students received £138,000 total support funds. It was noted that surplus funds amounting to £95,918 had been carried over to 2011/2012.
- b) Additional Support Funds. 187 students received £211,487 additional support funds.
- c) Care to Learn Funds. 21 students received £99,663 from the Care to Learn funds.
- d) Education Maintenance Allowance. 2,630 students were in receipt of Education Maintenance Allowance, a fortnightly payment of up to £60 for students 16-19 years.
- e) Safeguarding Report. Safeguarding policy, procedures and documentation were reviewed in June 2011. The ETI questionnaire, completed prior to every inspection, demonstrates that the College is in compliance with all current requirements. The report refers to 11 incidents during 2010/2011. The Deputy Director Support and Development advised that there had been an ETI survey of Safeguarding that afternoon and that the feedback had been very positive.
- f) Student Disciplinary Report. Disciplinary procedures were reviewed and amended in June 2011. The report indicates that during 2010/2011, 7 students were suspended and one dismissed for offences.

9.10 Economic Engagement Report

The Committee received the Economic Engagement Report 2010/2011, which provided the following details:

- a) Centres of Excellence. DEL has proposed that the sector consider an alternative model for the existing Centres of Excellence. A number of options will be forwarded by the sector EE group to Directors for consideration in January 2012.
- b) Employer Support Programme. DEL has confirmed that £1.2m is available for sector-based projects to March 2012 with a total of £5.7m available from 2012-2015. The expectation is that Colleges will contribute on a sectoral basis for projects funded by this programme.
- c) Programme for Government. NRC has forwarded a summary of its Economic Engagement activity for 2010-2011 to the sector group on the agreed KPI pro forma.
- d) Interreg Funds. Two Interreg applications, in which NRC is involved, have been approved to undergo an economic appraisal:
 - (i) Green Enterprises, Technology and Innovation (GETI)
 - (ii) Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland Partnership in Renewable Energy (INSPIRE).
- e) LSDA/ESB e-Developments. During 2010/2011 the College has worked with LSDA and City and Guilds to deliver on-line training to ESB in the Republic of Ireland.
- f) Council and Chamber of Commerce Engagement. The College has participated in a number of developments with Coleraine, Newtownabbey, Ballymena and Magherafelt Councils and Chambers of Commerce.

g) Worldskills. The Director informed the Committee that he and other senior staff had attended the Worldskills Competition at the ExCel Conference Centre in London 6-8 October 2011. Around 1000 competitors had participated in the event from over 50 countries. The UK Team consisted of 43 members competing in 37 skills. Seven Apprentices from Northern Ireland competed in the event including 3 from NRC. The Northern Ireland competitors had been very successful; Philip Green (BMC) had been awarded a gold medal; James Caffey (CAFRE) gained a silver medal; and Mark Maginty and Chris Downey (NRC) received Medallions of Achievement in the Mechatronics Skills area. David Nicholl (NRC) competed in the CNC Milling event. Both the College's showcase events, Performing Arts Road Show and Bio-Organic Cookery on the Causeway Coast, had been very successful. It was noted that the next Worldskills would be in Leipzig in 2013 and already some teams, Korea and Japan, had commenced training.

It was agreed that all the NRC participants at the Worldskills Competition should be invited to meet Governors prior to the next meeting of the Governing Body (24 November).

h) Big Idea. The College is involved in 'Big Idea' an innovative programme designed and delivered by AdvantageNI to help young people develop core skills and capabilities for enterprise and employability.

i) Big Lottery. NRC is working with the Educational Guidance Service for Adults (EGSA) to submit an application for funding for supporting older people.

j) STEM/Matrix Activity. Members of staff have attended meetings and have given presentations regarding the College's economic support for business.

k) International Activity. Students and staff have participated in a number of international events.

l) Connected. NRC has entered Year 2 of the 4 year Connected programme in relation to the knowledge transfer needs of businesses and the wider community.

m) Colleges into Industry Initiative. Two members of staff have undertaken placements during June 2011.

n) Strategic Developments 2011/2012. Several strategic developments are planned for 2011/2012. FG Wilson, for example, has agreed to pay for a NRC Lecturer to deliver training to meet their requirements. FG Wilson and NRC have also agreed an innovative and lucrative 2-year bursary scheme for six engineering students.

9.11 Quality Improvement

The Committee received an update regarding Quality Improvement. The Committee noted:

a) Training. Improving Quality Raising Standards (IQRS) – Scrutiny Inspection. It was noted that the IQRS report was assessed at the Grade 3 level.

b) Performance Management. Members of staff have participated in a number of master classes, seminars and modules relating to performance management. The Chairperson stressed the need to invest in middle management and to ensure that they participated in performance management classes and seminars.

The Committee also noted that NRC was developing a project, 'Improving Performance Management' to be led by the Deputy Director Support and Development and undertaken by a College Team. The ultimate aim is to further improve the quality of the curriculum and support services leading to an improvement in the overall student experience.

Following recent meetings, where NRC's performance has been discussed in the context of sector benchmarking, it has been proposed that the focus of project work will be directed towards the identification of areas of underperformance in the curriculum. In this context the Deputy Director Curriculum, the Deputy Director Support and Development and the Head of Quality Improvement have arranged a meeting with the Deloitte external project adviser on 21 October 2011 to consider issues including: the identification of areas of excellence and weaker practice; and the identification and implementation of a range of quality improvement support mechanisms.

It was noted that staff appraisal had a part to play in improved performance. The Committee was of the view that peer observation should be part of the appraisal process as in UK.

c) NRC KPIs. It is intended to review, revise and further develop a number of KPIs in relation to financial, estate, staffing, curriculum and strategic matters.

d) Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). A preparatory meeting, in relation to the Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review, Northern Ireland (IQERN), took place in August 2011, involving QAA officials and senior management.

The first stage in the evaluation process is a Developmental Engagement (DE) and a College Self-Evaluation Report and Student submission, both of which were forwarded to QAA in July 2011. The Self-Evaluation report lists a number of strengths and instances of good practice and indicates a number of key areas for development.

A visit by QAA is planned for 18-20 October 2011 when the team will test the College's self-evaluation.

e) Pastoral Care. It was noted that ETI had carried out a Pastoral Care Survey on 11 October 2011.

f) PGCE (FE). Suzanne Kennedy, Head of Quality Improvement, has been nominated as the College representative on the Advisory Board for the PGCE (FE).

9.12 Education Committee Action Plan 2011/2012

The Committee received its Action Plan for 2011/2012. It was suggested that the wording of some of the proposed activities should be adjusted. **The Committee agreed that the Chairperson and the Secretary should undertake an adjustment of the terminology before the next meeting.**

9.13 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further notified business to report. The meeting concluded at 7.50 pm.

9.14 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 6 December 2011 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

Una O'Kane, Chair

Jim Hunter, Secretary