

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 3 November 2009 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mrs U O’Kane (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director),
Mr K Nelson, Ms C Taylor and Mr A Watt

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

1.1 Membership of Committee

The Director informed the Committee that the Department for Employment and Learning had received AccessNI clearance for Mr Nelson and Ms Taylor and they were now in the course of preparing their letters of appointment as Members of the Governing Body.

The Committee elected Mrs U O’Kane as Chairperson and Mr K Nelson as Vice-Chairperson.

The Committee also agreed that the Governing Body should appoint an additional member to the Committee to bring it into line with the other Committees, which have six members.

1.2 Presentation : Essential Skills

In introducing the presentation on Essential Skills by Mr Sam Bell (Head of Faculty Business, Hospitality & Catering, Travel & Tourism, Sport & Essential Skills) and Mrs Kathleen Mullan (Head of School for Essential Skills), the Director stressed the importance of the Essential Skills provision at the College. He informed the Committee that the DEL had asked each college in the Sector to provide a brief Essential Skills Action Plan no later than 6 November 2009. In the circumstances he had asked Mr Bell and Mrs Mullan to make a presentation to the Committee prior to considering the Action Plan for submission to the Department.

Mr Bell and Ms Mullan explained the scope of Essential Skills, its importance to the College, its delivery and the difficulties encountered in relation to provision. They advised Members that the Essential Skills Strategy for Living had been launched by DEL in 2002 following the revelation by the International Adult Literacy Survey that 24% of those aged between 16 and 65 in Northern Ireland performed at the lowest level of literacy. Members noted that the Essential Skills provision had now been extended to include numeracy and ICT.

Mr Bell and Mrs Mullan drew Members’ attention to the Essential Skills target groups, consisting of some 1,200 adult evening students, 2,200 FE day learners and 700 training participants. They emphasised that poor literary and numeracy skills had serious consequences for the individual, society and the economy,

The presenters informed the Committee that 57,167 learners had obtained 66,928 qualifications since the introduction of Essential Skills in Northern Ireland in October 2002. They stated that there had been an increase in interest in the provision at the College over the past two years with enhanced enrolments, better retention rates and higher achievements.

Mention was made of the recent Essential Skills PSA Level 2 Inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate, who had identified much good practice but had also suggested areas for improvement.

Members raised a number of queries at the conclusion of the presentation in regard to marketing the provision, methods of assessment and benchmarking against the Sector. They were advised that there were several marketing tools such as the prospectus, DEL advertising and the College had a central point of contact for potential learners. The Committee was informed that a new assessment method was being piloted to replace the current system based on tests and portfolios. Members were also advised that the Essential Skills Network provided a useful forum for benchmarking the College against the rest of the Sector.

The Committee proceeded to discuss the Essential Skills Action Plan. It was noted that action was being taken to raise awareness of and to secure the commitment of academic and support staff. Course Teams had been established to develop relationships, achieve cooperation and to stress ownership of the provision. Observations were made regarding difficulties encountered in the motivation of students and in the acquisition of appropriate study material. It was noted that great care was required with timetabling to encourage maximum attendance and retention.

Referring to the high number of individuals with poor literacy and numeracy skills, the Director expressed the view that this cast doubts regarding the efficacy of the education system at primary and post-primary levels in Northern Ireland. He added that the College was picking up problems, which needed to be addressed by the whole education system. The Chairperson stated that the Area Learning Community Scheme, with its emphasis on collaboration, has the potential to address this problem

The Committee agreed that the Essential Skills Action Plan be approved for submission to the Department.

The Chairperson thanked Mr Bell and Mrs Mullan for an informative presentation.

1.3 Terms of Reference

The Committee noted that the draft Terms of Reference, approved by the Governing Body at its meeting on 7 October 2009, had been adjusted since the meeting as a result of suggestions from the Deputy Director Curriculum and the Deputy Director Support and Development. The Director advised Members that additional adjustments could be incorporated as and when required by the Committee.

The Committee endorsed the revised Terms of Reference attached and recommended them to the Governing Body for approval

1.4 Schedule of Meetings

The Committee received a paper recommending the following schedule of meetings for the Education Committee:

Tuesday 3 November 2009 at 5.30 pm

Tuesday 26 January 2010 at 5.30 pm

Tuesday 23 March 2010 at 7.00 pm

Tuesday 1 June 2010 at 5.30 pm

The Director advised Members of the need for a meeting of the Committee before the Christmas vacation to discuss the curriculum implications of the Business Improvement Plan. He said that this might replace the meeting scheduled for January 2010.

The Committee agreed the Schedule and an additional meeting will be held on 30 November 2009.

1.5 Agenda Items

The Committee considered a paper providing a list of topics for discussion at future meetings. The Director stated that he was keen to have presentations from Faculties at meetings in order to apprise Members of the College's educational and training provision.

It was agreed the Director and Deputy Directors, in collaboration with the Chairperson, should prepare an Education Committee Action Plan, which would prioritise the discussion topics and take into consideration the Committee's Terms of Reference.

1.6 Enrolments

a) The Committee received a Report prepared by the Deputy Director Curriculum concerning Full-Time Further Education and Full-Time Higher Education enrolments for 2009/2010. It was noted that Full-Time FE recruitment to-date had increased from 3,012 in 2008/2009 to 3,332 in 2009/2010 against a DEL target of 3,262. Provided retention rates can be improved, the College is well placed to achieve the target set by DEL. The Deputy Director informed Members that class sizes had been enlarged to enable the increase in enrolments to be accommodated in the same number of classes.

The Deputy Director pointed out that all the curriculum areas had met or were well placed to meet their targets. He drew attention to the considerable changes in enrolments on the various campuses reflecting the changes in enrolments in the vocational areas. He said that the relatively small overall numbers at Antrim and Larne were giving rise to concern about their long-term viability.

The Deputy Director stated that there had been an increase in Full-Time Higher Education enrolments. There had been 262 enrolments, which was above the Maximum Aggregate Student Number (MaSN) cap of 249, set by DEL. He said that it was critical to retain HE students in order to achieve the MaSN target.

b) The Governing Body received a Report on Enrolment Trends for the 2009/2010 Full-Time Training Provision, prepared by the Deputy Director Support and Development. Members were advised that the overall picture of total enrolment was still emerging as a result of the staggered approach to registration on the Training Programme. It was noted that there had been substantial changes to the training provision, such as the 2-Year Programme Led Apprenticeship, making 'like with like' comparisons difficult.

The Deputy Director stated that there had been a decline in the overall number of Training enrolments in 2009/2010 compared with this time last year, which can be accounted for by the decline in recruitment in Electrical Installation, the withdrawal of 3rd year Electrical Installation Apprenticeships from NRC by the Electrical Trust and a slight decline in retention and progression in a number of classes.

The Deputy Director provided statistics in regard to the location of the vocational areas delivered in Training across the campuses. She said that the present position would inform where the College delivers a number of specialisms in the future. She also stated that consideration would be given in the Business Improvement Plan and Recontracting 2010 to contracting for Priority Skills Areas only or Engineering/Motor Vehicle/Built Environment only. She mentioned that consideration would also be given to the provision of Training for Success aligned with the Entitlement Framework curriculum or whether the vocational areas at this level would be offered through FE.

The Deputy Director drew attention to the new intake enrolment of 574 students for Training, in September 2009, which represented an increase of approximately of 1% on 2008/2009 and that the College had met its planned overall target for 2009/2010. The updated MIS figure for

October 2009 indicated a new intake of 634, approximately 15% increase on 08/09. This increase had been subsumed into existing classes thereby maximising efficiency.

She highlighted a number of key issues arising from her Report including: the decline in employed status apprenticeships from 65% in 2007/2008 to 17% in 2009/2010; and the significant decline in electrical installation and plumbing. She advised the Committee that the College's approach to developing a costing model for training had been taken up by the Sector.

1.7 Students' Council Constitution

The Deputy Director Support and Development presented a draft Students' Council Constitution. She explained that the Council has an important role in promoting social and other activities, including the welfare of students. The Students' Council is an autonomous body but certain aspects of its activities are a matter for the Governing Body. The Council must conduct its affairs in accordance with a Constitution approved by the Governing Body.

She also presented a paper detailing Student Representation arrangements. She emphasised that it was important that the interests and views of students are represented and addressed at all levels throughout the College. She stated that all students are automatically members of the Students' Council. She explained that students elect class representatives and Student Education and Welfare Officers, who become members of the Campus based Representative Committee; they also elect three Vice-Presidents, one per Campus Grouping. The Student President, who acts as the College Student Governor, is taken from each Campus grouping on a rotational basis.

The Student Executive, which consists of the elected Student Education and Welfare Officers and the President and two Vice Presidents, have responsibility for implementing and representing Student Council policies within the College and externally.

Following consideration **the Committee endorsed the Students' Council Constitution and Student Representation Arrangements and agreed that they be forwarded to the Governing Body for approval.**

1.8 Any Other Notified Business

There was no notified business

1.9 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded Members that the next scheduled meeting would be on Tuesday 26 January 2010 at 5.30 pm at the Farm Lodge Campus, Ballymena.

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

Constitution

The Governing Body has established, in accordance with the provisions of its Instrument and Articles, a committee known as the Education Committee.

Remit

The Education Committee oversees the College's curricular provision, with a focus on its quality and appropriateness for the community served by the College.

Its role is to advise the Director on: the general oversight of the academic work of the College, such as admission, assessment and examination of students; curriculum development; staff development; and provisions for suspension or expulsion of students for academic reasons.

Membership

The Committee shall consist of at least four members of the Governing Body and the Director of the College; a quorum shall be three members. In addition non-governors may be co-opted by the Governing Body to provide specialist expertise.

The Chairperson and the Vice-Chairperson shall be elected by the Committee. In the absence of the Chairperson the Vice-Chairperson will assume the role.

The Deputy Director (Curriculum) will be in attendance at all meetings.

Authority

The Committee is authorised by the Governing Body to investigate any activity within its terms of reference. It is authorised to seek any information it requires from any employee, and all employees are directed to co-operate with any request made by the Committee.

The Committee is authorised by the Governing Body to obtain outside legal advice or other independent professional advice and to secure the attendance of non-members with relevant experience and expertise, if it considers this necessary, normally in consultation with a designated officer and/or the Chairperson of the Governing Body.

Duties

The responsibilities of the Education Committee are:

- a) To review the College's educational and training mission at all levels [FE, HE etc] to ensure it is appropriate to the needs of its students and the community;
- b) To review the nature, range, accessibility and quality of the College's curriculum provision to ensure it is appropriate to students;
- c) To ensure that separately funded and contracted programmes, such as Training for Success, are effectively monitored and delivered;
- d) To review those elements of the College Development Plan in which the Department for Employment and Learning effectively contracts with the College to deliver agreed levels of provision;

- e) To review returns to the Department through which the College is expected to demonstrate the extent to which it has delivered against commitments in the previous year's business plan;
- f) To be aware of DEL strategic proposals, the broader educational environment and current issues in the educational environment;
- g) To ensure input from Sector Skills Councils and other Bodies on the skills needs of the region is being taken account of in the curriculum/training;
- h) To ensure that VEP and other links with secondary schools are effectively provided for;
- i) To review the impact of curricular proposals placed before the Committee on the educational provision for students;
- j) To review, in conjunction with the Staffing Committee, academic staff training and curricular development to ensure needs match the changing requirements for a relevant curriculum for the College's students;
- k) To review the quality and effectiveness of students' teaching and learning experiences;
- l) To review the quality of Student Services including support services, career guidance and student resources;
- m) To review and evaluate students' outcomes including enrolment, retention and achievement rates;
- l) To evaluate the relevance of the curriculum to the educational and vocational needs of all of its students including those students with special educational needs;
- m) To review inclusiveness and accessibility for all students to the College's curriculum;
- n) To monitor the College's Equal Opportunities Strategy;
- o) To monitor and advise in regard to the suspension or expulsion of students for academic reasons;
- p) To contribute personal experience and expertise in order to contribute to the process of continuous improvement.