

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 30 November 2009 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

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

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

2.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr K Nelson and Mr A Watt.

2.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

2.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 3 November 2009, were approved.

2.4 Matters Arising

2.4.1 Membership (minute 1.1)

The Committee noted that the Governing Body, at its meeting on 25 November 2009, had agreed that the appointment of an additional member be delayed until the appointment of the new Governor, who might have appropriate expertise and be willing to serve as a member of the Committee.

2.4.2 Terms of Reference (minute 1.3)

The Committee noted that the Governing Body, at its meeting on 25 November 2009, had agreed the revised Terms of Reference of the Committee.

2.4.3 Education Action Plan and Committee Effectiveness (minute 1.5)

The Deputy Director Support and Development reminded Members that the Committee (3 November 2009) had agreed that an Education Action Plan should be prepared for the next meeting, which would prioritise discussion topics discussed at the last meeting and take into consideration the Committee’s Terms of Reference.

The Deputy Director explained that the Plan had grouped a number of areas for the Committee to monitor and consider at its first two meetings and had detailed several issues to be monitored throughout the academic year. The Committee considered that the Staffing Committee, rather than the Education Committee, should review Continuous Professional Development and this item should be withdrawn from the Action Plan. It also agreed that the Committee should receive an Annual Report regarding the expulsion and suspension of students and child protection issues. It was appreciated that serious incidents would have to be reported as and when necessary to the Committee.

The Committee noted the adjusted Action Plan for 2009/2010 and agreed that it be approved.

It was noted that the Plan would enable the Committee to review its effectiveness at the final meeting of the academic year on 1 June 2010.

2.5 Part-Time Enrolments 2009/2010

The Deputy Director Curriculum presented a paper detailing figures for part-time enrolments for 2007/2008 to 2009/2010. Statistics were shown by school and by campus as at 1 November in each of the years to enable comparisons to be made, as figures tend to increase during the year as new courses commence.

The Deputy Director stated that the recession had had an impact on enrolments in all Schools but particularly in construction, built environment and IT courses. In general the figures show a further small decline in the number of part-time enrolments in the region of 7%. Part-time vocational enrolments have remained constant but the non-vocational enrolments have dropped by 25%. The number of students on non-vocational courses is below the 5% of the total allowed by DEL; it is difficult to know, at this stage, if the Department intends the 5% to be achieved or to be an upper limit not to be exceeded.

He said that the decline in enrolments was not purely a result of lower demand but was also the result of the College's drive for efficiency, courses which did not achieve their enrolment targets, were closed with a consequent loss of students. Referring to the decision to dispense with discretionary fees for persons over 60 years of age, he advised the Committee that the reduction in enrolments had not been as significant as first thought.

He pointed out that the most striking development in 2009/2010 was the large decline in enrolments in off-campus sites at Newtownabbey and Ballymena; the College felt these arrangements were too expensive and had made the provision unviable. Community education at Coleraine, however, had shown a rise indicating that this is a market, which can be expanded but it may not be financially viable to do so.

The Deputy Director indicated that, given the decline in enrolments on most campuses, it may be possible to fit classes into a smaller number of evenings with consequent savings.

The Committee discussed how to reverse the downward trend in part-time enrolments. The Chairperson stated that Marketing was critical to the promotion of part-time courses. The Director advised that it was essential to achieve a balance between the provision of such courses and affordability. It would be necessary, he said, for the College to seek other sources of income to support part-time provision. He referred to the College's success in securing Big Lottery Funding amounting to £800k over five years to promote Lifelong Learning at the Magherafelt and Antrim Campuses. He mentioned that the Department had launched its Learning Access and Engagement programme in September 2008 to provide opportunities for mainly voluntary and community bodies to provide learner support through a contractual arrangement with Colleges. A sum of £500k per annum for each College had been earmarked to support the pilot programme over a three-year period. The Director stated that it had proved difficult for Colleges to access these funds, as only larger bodies had been able to enter into contractual arrangements with Colleges. The Director said that it would be necessary to address community education at the forthcoming Strategic Workshop on 13 January 2010.

The Committee agreed that the Deputy Director Curriculum should prepare options for increasing part-time enrolments for discussion at a future meeting.

The Committee noted the Report.

2.6 Any Other Notified Business

There was no notified business

2.7 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.