

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 10 February 2015 at the Newtownabbey Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mr R Jay (Chairperson), Professor T Scott (Principal), Mr C Chan, Mrs J Eve
Mr A Kennedy, Mr M Murray and Mr K Nelson

In Attendance Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

25.1 Apologies

There were no apologies.

25.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

25.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 9 December 2014, were approved.

25.4 Matters Arising

25.4.1 Terms of Reference (minute 24.4.2)

The Committee forwarded revised Terms of Reference to the Governing Body (28 January 2015) for approval. The Governing Body agreed that the section relating to 'Authority' should be removed as the essence of the section was covered in the 'Remit' section. **The Governing Body agreed that the Terms be approved subject to the removal of the section on 'Authority'.**

25.4.2 Priority Skills (minute 24.7 a)). Dr O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum, explained that the variance between the revised target and actual FLU in respect of Priority Skills provision had resulted from lower than anticipated recruitment to FT FE courses in these areas.

25.4.3 Quality Performance (minute 24.7 b)). Dr O'Mullan advised that all courses that were currently performing below the 60% success threshold have been reviewed with a view to teams taking action to improve their performance or withdrawal from the curriculum for 2015/2016

There were no further matters arising from the minutes of the last meeting.

25.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no communications from the Chair

25.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted that correspondence had been received from DEL, dated 16 December 2014, regarding the CDP process and timetable for 2015/2016. It was noted that there had been changes to the CDP process. Colleges will now receive a provisional budget notification from the Department. It was anticipated that notification would be received by 30 January

2015 but the College is still awaiting a communication from the Department. Following notification Colleges will be required to forward FLU proposals to DEL, which will be discussed at the bilateral meeting scheduled for 1 April 2015.

The correspondence stimulated wide ranging discussion particularly in relation to the future of EF provision at the College. The Principal forecast a gradual withdrawal from the EF programme over the next few years as Colleges were losing ground as a consequence of increased competition from schools. To survive it would be necessary for the College to concentrate on courses unique to NRC. It was emphasised that staff required more focussed CPD to keep pace with developments in Engineering and ICT. Mr Nelson suggested that the College should attempt to gain a 'gold standard' Investors in People award. Mr Murray expressed concern that more focussed CPD would concentrate on Ballymena and Newtownabbey to the exclusion of other campuses. The Principal advised that staff throughout the College would have access to appropriate professional development making use of virtual learning facilities.

25.7 Balanced Scorecard

The Director of Curriculum provided an update regarding the Student Experience domain of the Balanced Scorecard highlighting the following:

a) FLU Performance 2014/2015. The FLU performance as at 30 January 2015 was 251 below target; the predicted year-end outturn is 262 below target (-4%). The 2% tolerance level for FLU performance still exists but may be superseded by a revised approach. The main contributory factor to under-performance has been the under-recruitment in full-time FE. The College Management Team has recently reported that there is little opportunity to add to the in-year FLU count as no campus based part-time FE provision is planned or has been requested during the remainder of the academic year. In response to a query, Dr O'Mullan advised that under-recruitment to FE had largely been caused by increased competition and demographics.

The Director of Curriculum advised the Committee that the Department had instructed Colleges to cease recruitment to the Learner Access and Engagement Initiative, which is likely to contribute to an underachievement of the Essential Skills FLU target set by DEL.

b) Whole College Retention 2014/2015. The retention rate at 30 January 2015 was 96.3%, which is in excess of the target 92%.

25.7 Self Evaluation and Quality Improvement Planning

The Committee received a paper, which drew attention to the following inspections:

a) **ETI Scrutiny Inspection.** The ETI has indicated that the College has improved the overall quality of its provision, along with its self evaluation and quality improvement planning process over the past year. Consequently, ETI has confidence in the self evaluation and quality improvement processes in the NRC. The Inspectors stated that the College had demonstrated many strengths but also identified areas for improvement.

NRC was evaluated during the ETI scrutiny of its self evaluation and quality improvement planning processes against 5 criteria:

(i) Provide effective curricular leadership and management to ensure good quality teaching, training and learning, to meet the needs of staff, learners and stakeholders - Limited confidence. ETI stressed the need for the College to put in place a high level curriculum plan. The Chair expressed the view that the College had lost some 18 months in the development of a curriculum plan to articulate key strategic priorities, estate development, strategies to increase blended learning and evidence of demand.

(ii) Use appropriate self-evaluation and improvement planning processes to review provision and effect improvement of the quality of teaching, training and learning - Confidence.

(iii) Collate, interpret and use effectively an appropriate range of relevant and reliable data to improve performance - High confidence. It was noted that data was being well used to evaluate performance and to reflect the quality of teaching and learning.

(iv) Seek and act upon the views of different user groups, to plan, manage and improve the provision, including engaging learners in internal review and self-evaluation arrangements - Limited confidence. ETI has recommended the more effective collation, analysis and inclusion of feedback from employers, staff and students at course team level to inform the self evaluation and quality improvement planning processes. The Principal stated that there was a need to develop a more effective customer management system; Mr Nelson suggested that the College should consider adopting the Customer Service Excellence system

(v) Demonstrate the capacity to sustain continuous improvement, including effective and innovative strategies to raise standards and improve the quality of teaching, training and learning - Confidence. ETI has recommended a number of key areas for development including TEL and feedback mechanisms

It was noted that two main areas for improvement are being addressed immediately by the Director of Curriculum:

(i) The collation of a strategic curriculum plan for the College identifying key curriculum developments, which will also address feedback from ETI on the OBC and form the basis of the SIP; and

(ii) The implementation of a plan to improve stakeholder feedback.

b) ETI Interim Follow Up Inspection (Wood Occupations and Brickwork). The Inspection Team looked at relevant Work Based Learning (WBL) documentation and spoke to all staff and some trainees. Given the context that the interim visit was only three months after the previous inspection, ETI reported that the College is making satisfactory progress.

25.8 Curriculum Planning

The Committee received a paper providing an overview of NRC's approach to the recent revised planning processes in preparation for the FLU bilateral. There will be further refinements after the initial current grant allocation has been received in early February. It is anticipated that the initial recurrent grant allocations will take cognisance of trends in FLU performance and the sector budget reductions. The Director of Curriculum advised that the College was anticipating a reduction of up to £1m for 2015/2016. As a result the CMT is presently realigning the curriculum plan with present budget information, withdrawing courses no longer viable and including new courses

Dr O'Mullan highlighted the following aspects of curriculum planning:

a) Higher Education Provision. NRC continues to expand its portfolio of full-time HE courses by increasing its Foundation Degree and STEM provision. The College plans to increase its MaSN allocation from 282 in 2013/2014 to 422 in 2017/2018, an increase of 50% over a 4-year period. The Director of Curriculum explained that the bid for 30 new places took into consideration under-recruitment in 2014/2015.

The Chair indicated that there had also been under-recruitment in PT HE. Dr O'Mullan advised that an effort was being made to increase recruitment and consideration was being given to the provision of PT Foundation Degrees. The proposed 'cap' to part-time HE provision was noted.

b) Higher level Apprenticeships (HLA). DEL has announced funding for 300 additional HLA places for September 2015. NRC is planning to enroll a second cohort (10 places) in HLA Engineering and considering HLAs in ICT, Science and Accountancy.

c) Further Education. Several new FE courses are planned for 2015/2016. The withdrawal of funding for leisure and hobby classes will impact on the College portfolio. A Member commented that most of the new courses were focused on Ballymena or Newtownabbey.

d) Essential Skills. The College awaits further information on funding and targets from DEL.

e) Work Based Learning (WBL). DEL has confirmed that funding for WBL has been ring fenced.

f) Business Development Activity. It is anticipated that significant changes to the realignment of DEL departments and funding streams will increase opportunities for Colleges to be the sole providers of skills delivery.

Dr O'Mullan referred to the College's marketing activities, which had been streamlined to ensure consistency of the admission process across the organisation (**see details of admissions and Marketing Activities at Appendix 1**).

The Committee agreed that the Director of Planning and Customer Services should arrange for a presentation on marketing at the next meeting

h) STEM Centre. NRC will continue its work with NEF to develop and establish its STEM Centre

25.9 Student Council

The Committee received a Report regarding Student Council activity. The following issues were noted:

a) Executive Committee. During the last three months members of the Student Executive Committee have met with the Lead Manager of their campus and have raised a number of specific issues relating to catering, IT facilities and clubs. Many of the issues raised have already been dealt with or are currently being progressed.

The Student President referred to the Widening Access and Participation (WAP) agreement, which has been devised to facilitate and increase participation in higher education for those groups, which are currently under represented in HE and in particular students from disadvantaged backgrounds and students with learning difficulties and disabilities. He stressed the need for the College to support disadvantaged students with bursaries at an appropriate level to lessen the impact of higher fees being set for HE courses. Mr Chan also raised a query regarding the eligibility for student loans for participants on Foundation Degree courses. It was considered that it would be for the student body to challenge the current system regarding student loans.

b) Events and Activities. The Committee noted that a comprehensive list had been provided of events and activities from October 2014 to January 2015.

25.10 Any Other Notified Business

25.10.1 Committee Business

It was suggested that Education Committee business should be more strategically focussed and more streamlined. Although the Committee had a scrutiny role there was a need for more recommendations to come to the Committee for approval

As there was no other notified business to consider the meeting concluded at 7.30 pm.

25.11 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on **Tuesday 24 March 2015** at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

R Jay, Chair

J A Hunter, Secretary