

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 12 February 2014 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mr R Jay (Chairperson), Mr A Kennedy, Mr M Murray and Mr T Neilands (Principal)

In Attendance Mr G Gilpin, Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

20.1 Apologies

An apology was received from Mrs J Eve, Mr S Kelly and Mr K Nelson.

20.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

20.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 10 December 2013, were approved.

20.4 Matters Arising

20.4.1 ETi Monitoring Visit December 2013 (minute 19.4.1)

The Committee noted that the ETI had carried out an inspection of the Further Education and Work-based Learning provision in the College in November 2012. The ETI indicated that a follow-up inspection would take place for some aspects of the provision. The first interim follow-up visit took place in May 2013 and the second interim follow-up visit took place in December 2013.

The Committee noted that the ETI has confirmed that the College is making satisfactory progress in addressing the key areas for improvement identified in the Work-based Learning provision in the original inspection report.

The Inspection Team noted that the College had taken a number of steps since the first interim inspection to address the areas for improvement. Reference was made to the helpful series of meetings conducted by the Learning and Teaching Committee with staff from all of the work-based learning programmes and the sharing of best practice across the College through a number of staff conferences.

The ETI listed several areas of strength such as the improving use of tracking systems to monitor learner progress. It also indicated a number of areas requiring further action such as the need to develop more effective curriculum planning processes in further education and work-based learning.

20.4.2 Statistical Bulletin – Professional and Technical Retention and Achievement Data (minute 19.6b))

The Statistical Bulletin has been produced by DEL using data collected in the Further Education Leavers Survey. It gives details of final year enrolments, completers (Retention) and achievers (Achievement) on Professional and Technical courses. It was noted that the

Principal at the last meeting of the Education Committee (10 December 2013) had suggested that further consideration should be given to the breakdown of performance by level and subject area as detailed in the Bulletin.

The Committee examined the Professional & Technical Retention and Achievement Data and noted that NRC had the lowest retention rate in the Sector but had an achievement rate reflecting the Sector average. The inference that the College was dispensing with weaker students to achieve higher achievement rates was without foundation. The statistics stressed the importance of placing students on appropriate courses.

The Principal drew attention to data regarding Sector Retention Rates by Subject Areas. It was noted that these areas do not correspond with the College's Department and School structure making it difficult to make meaningful comparisons.

20.4.3 Any Other Matters Arising

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

20.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairman's communications.

20.6 Correspondence

The Committee noted the following correspondence:

a) Review of Apprenticeships (Interim Report) January 2014. The Committee received the executive summary of the consultation document seeking views on a series of proposals for a new model of apprenticeships for Northern Ireland under the following themes: the components of an apprenticeship; increasing participation; partnership – the role of the key players and ensuring quality. These proposals seek to define the vision and underpinning key principles for an apprenticeship model of the future.

It was noted that feedback received through the consultation process will be used to inform the final policy for apprenticeships, which will be published in the early summer of 2014. The College had already submitted an individual response to the first consultation and also intends to make a submission to the Department regarding the latest document.

The Principal stated that it was an encouraging Review. DEL was aspiring to increase the status of the apprentice route into professional and technical occupations, to spread apprenticeships beyond traditional industries and to build progression routes to Level 3 Studies and Foundation Degrees. It was envisaged that Colleges would have a key role to play in the proposed scheme for apprenticeships.

The Committee noted that a central service would be introduced to market, promote and support apprenticeship provision by engaging with employers and potential participants.

b) FE Colleges Health Check 1st Quarter 2013/2014. The Committee received a copy of the FE College Health Check Report Issue 1 2013/2014 prepared on the 2012/2013 Final Accounts and the 2013/2014 1st Quarter information submitted to the Department in December 2013.

The Committee gave consideration, in particular, to the following sections:

a) Annex 1, which shows the percentage of under/over delivery on FLU targets and the financial impact for each college in the key areas of Further Education, Essential Skills and Higher Education.

A summary of the projected results of actual FLUs against target for 2013/2014 indicate an under delivery particularly in full-time FE places. The Committee noted that NRC was at or better than the Sector average in relation to FE, ES and HE targets.

b) Annex 2, which provides details of the retention, achievement and success performances in each of the six colleges. The overall NRC Professional and Technical figures indicate that the College is below Sector average for Retention and Success in 2012/2013 and at Sector average for Achievement.

Reference was made to Bespoke Training particularly in Engineering, where the achievement rate is some 30%. It was noted that companies do not seek accreditation certificates for the training received. Dr O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum, stated that the College would remedy the situation in the near future by issuing Certificates of Achievement on course completion.

20.7 Balanced Scorecard

The Director of Curriculum provided an update regarding the Student Experience domain of the Balanced Scorecard. The Committee noted that an under-delivery of 412 FLUs against target was predicted for 2013/2014 with a whole College Retention rate, presently 98.1%.

20.8 Quality Improvement

The Committee considered the following documents:

a) QAA Quality Improvement Plan. The College has submitted a Quality Improvement Action Plan to QAA to identify actions to address findings detailed in the QAA Integrated Quality and Enhancement Review. The Action Plan will be monitored by the College HE Committee and SMT. Dr O'Mullan said that in the course of the Review, the Team had identified several areas of good practice such as enhancements to the curriculum, increasing students' employability skills, extensive and effective engagements with employers and effective public information.

Referring to the section of the Action Plan relating to Student Employability, the Chair suggested that a target should be set for Student feedback.

b) Learning and Teaching Panels. The Committee noted that:

(i) The Principal, Director of Curriculum and Head of Quality Improvement had met with the Heads of School and Curriculum Managers as part of the annual review of School performance. Discussions have taken place regarding three-year trends for FE, HE, WBL, ES and EF. It was noted that remedial action relating to a number of courses had already been initiated following Learning and Teaching Panel meetings with senior staff.

(ii) Classroom Observation Scheme. A Classroom Observation Scheme has been implemented during 2013/2014 focussing largely on Essential Skills and Built Environment in order to support preparation for the ETI follow-up inspection. The Curriculum Directors' Group has been tasked with developing a Sector scheme taking forward best practice from all six Colleges. The Director of Curriculum and the Head of Quality Improvement have commenced strategic discussions with the University of Ulster to promote the quality of teaching and learning.

(iii) Whole College Self Evaluation Review and Quality Improvement Plan Scrutiny Visit by ETI. The ETI has expressed confidence in the self-evaluation and quality improvement planning processes at the College. The Inspection Team has identified a number of strengths and areas for improvement.

20.9 Planning, Monitoring and Review Quality Cycle 2013/2014

The Committee received a copy of the Planning, Monitoring and Review Quality Cycle 2013/2014, which is reviewed on an annual basis. The Director of Curriculum has proposed a

number of changes to the 2013/2014 Planning Cycle, focussing on 3 year curriculum planning deadlines. The Committee also received a copy of the 2014/2015 Cycle, which illustrates how revised timelines will facilitate further integration into whole College planning and self-evaluation activities. It is proposed that plans should be reviewed in May/June of each year for the next 3 year cycle.

The Committee approved the revised Planning, Monitoring and Review Quality Cycles for 2013/2014 and 2014/2015.

20.10 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further unreserved business to consider

20.11 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 25 March 2014 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.