

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 16 June 2014 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

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

In Attendance Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

22.1 Apologies

An apology was received from Mr K Nelson.

22.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

22.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 6 May 2014 were approved.

22.4 Matters Arising

22.4.1 Business Development (minute 21.9)

The Committee received a paper regarding Business Development. It was noted that the Business Development Department is responsible for Economic Engagement activity, Enterprise activity, Community provision and International work. The Business Development Department has provided targets and planned activities for each of these areas in 2014/2015.

Dr O'Mullan, Director of Curriculum stated that the targets for Economic Engagement activity are informed by DEL initiatives and funding streams and by bespoke training work for employers. The income targets for Economic Engagement work for 2014/2015 amount to £841,069. It was noted that there was no guarantee that funding would be available for the DEL Employer Support programme after March 2015 and for the Assured Skills programme for 2015/2016. As a consequence the income over the three year period 2013/2014 to 2015/2016 would decrease. The Chair expressed unease at the outcome and asked for the three year plan to be reviewed to look at not only income generation but also at the costing of activities. He advised that the plan would also require adjustments in light of the Tribal recommendations and the NEF initiatives.

Referring to bespoke training the Principal indicated that the Business Development Team and curriculum staff work together to maximise opportunities. He said that bespoke training relied too heavily on Engineering. It would be important for the College to fully exploit other STEM areas in the future.

Attention was drawn to an electronic employer survey, which was circulated in March 2014 to a range of employers including those the College engages with for trainee placements, apprenticeships and bespoke training. The survey was also circulated to a range of employers with whom the College has no formal contacts. Despite working with a number of employers to promote the survey the response rate (16%) was low. The Committee noted that the outcomes from the survey were very positive.

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

22.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairman's communications.

22.6 Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report

22.7 Balanced Scorecard

The Director of Curriculum provided an update regarding the Student Experience domain of the Balanced Scorecard and detailed the proposed targets for 2014/2015. The Committee noted:

a) FLU Management. There has been a shortfall of 72 against the FLU target of 6,628 after the tolerance level has been taken into consideration. The total FLU target for 2014/2015 is 6,602 FLUs.

The Committee noted correspondence from DEL, dated 12 June 2014, regarding a notification it had received from the College that 55 NRC enrolments, generating £311k FLU value, have been missing from the 2013/2014 data. NRC has informed the Department that the error was due to a known 'bug', which the College had created a validation check to counteract in 2011/2012. With the introduction of the Consolidated Data Extract last year, the validation option was no longer available leading to the continuation of the error. The Department has expressed concern that checks and balances appear to have failed and attributes blame to both management and governance.

The Chair questioned whether the College could have detected the 'bug' and the Education Committee and the Governing Body the error at an earlier stage. A view was expressed that it would be unreasonable to expect Governors to question the integrity of all computer generated statistics. It was noted that the statistics in question had been accepted by DEL and had been included in its FE College Health Check. It was only after a further validation check by the College that the omission was detected.

The Chair said that following the initial FLU analysis the Education Committee had noted the under-performance at FE and had attributed it to under-recruitment. The Committee had not ignored the situation and had explored the management of under-recruitment and the rationalisation of provision

Dr O'Mullan advised the Committee that the omission had no impact on the College's recurrent grant for 2014/2015 but would have a positive impact on the 2015/2016 bid.

The Principal stated that the College intended to respond to the letter from Dr McIvor. It was noted that the Chair of the Governing Body would also wish to make an input in relation to governance matters.

b) Retention. The whole college Retention rates are performing well against targets - 90% (in-year DEL) and 90.2% (Whole course eti). The target rates for 2014/2015 are 92% and 85% respectively;

c) The whole college Achievement rates for the FLU funded provision are ahead of target at 87%. The target rate for 2014/2015 is 85%;

d) Success. The success rate targets for 2014/2015 are 78% and 72% respectively;

e) Student Voice. It is proposed to retain the target of 4.50 for student satisfaction rates for 2014/2015;

f) Quality of Provision. It is proposed that the target remains the same – the achievement of a minimum grade 3 or equivalent in all inspections/surveys

22.8 Curriculum Planning

The Committee received a paper on Curriculum Planning, which provided details of:

a) Curriculum Planning. Several key issues have been addressed:

(i) FLU Provision. The College has bid for 6,794 FLUs in 2014/2015 and has been allocated 6,602 FLUs. It was noted that the College had been allocated an additional 50 MaSN places for STEM full-time HE provision and the ES FLU target had been modified to 450 FLUs;

(ii) Work Based Learning. A WBL Delivery Plan has been established for 2014/2015. The Plan includes the introduction of the Higher Apprenticeship provision in Engineering and a sustained ETT provision;

(iii) Entitlement Framework Plan. The Plan is being finalised with all of the Learning Communities. Initial figures suggest that NRC provision will be reduced in 2014/2015 with a number of schools undertaking their own provision;

(iv) STEM Developments. The College has engaged with NEF Innovation Institute to further STEM developments and to achieve STEM Assured Status.

b) Review of College Delivery Plans 2014/2015. An annual review of delivery plans has taken place. Several actions have been identified to effect efficiency in course delivery and to provide an enhanced provision for students. It is estimated that across the College this approach will contribute up to 100 additional FLUs and reduce the potential additional staff hours to deliver the proposed 2014/2015 curriculum plan by 50% (subject to confirmation).

c) DEL correspondence, dated 9 June 2014, regarding the Recurrent Budget Allocations for 2014/2015. NRC has been allocated £22,071,730 and DEL has extended the deadline for submission of budgets to the Department from the end of June 2014 to 30 September 2014. The Principal stated that a paper was being prepared for the Governing Body (25 June 2014) regarding the budget approval process.

d) DEL correspondence, dated 10 June 2014, notifying the College that it has been allocated 332 HE in FE places for the academic year 2014/2015, representing an increase of 50 places on the previous year.

22.9 Quality Improvement

Committee received a Report on Quality Improvement, which highlighted:

a) Progress to date in respect of the Whole College Self Evaluation Report and Quality Improvement Plan. It was noted that eti would be visiting the College on 20 June 2014. The Director of Curriculum stated that it was anticipated that the Inspectorate would wish to discuss the integration of WBL into the Whole College SER and Quality Improvement Plan. ;

b) ETI Follow-Up Visit, which is not taking place as expected at the end of the academic year 2013/2014; and

c) Mid Year Student Feedback, which provides trends in student satisfaction rates. The Director of Curriculum has requested each School to consider areas of positive feedback and good practice and areas of concern and develop mechanisms to monitor remedial action.

22.10 Campus Services and Marketing

The Committee noted that the previous staffing structure of Campus Services and Marketing was based on the needs of a six campus model. The closures of the Antrim Campus and changes in Larne necessitated a review of staff levels and functions of the Department.

As part of a restructuring exercise, the existing 4 sections have been merged into Campus Services and Student Services. The structure has been implemented and is working effectively to achieve a quality, efficient and smooth-running admissions process with a view to recruiting and retaining a higher number of students for the academic year 2014/2015.

22.11 FE College Health Check issue 2 – 2013/2014

The Committee received a copy of the FE College Health Check Issue 2. The Committee noted:

- a) Section 1 Comparative Performance Information;
- b) Section 2 Performance against CDP Curriculum Targets. It was noted that NRC's performance against FE would be better once the omission of 91 FLU was taken into consideration; and
- c) Section 5 Education and Training Inspectorate and FAST Reports. FAST has issued a satisfactory assurance in relation to the administration of DEL Training programmes.

22.12 Education Committee Action Plan 2014/2015

The Committee considered and made adjustments to the Education Committee Action Plan for 2014/2015.

The Committee agreed that the revised Action Plan be approved (see Appendix 1).

22.13 Education Committee Annual Report 2013/2014

The Committee considered and approved the Education Committee Annual Report for 2013/2014 and agreed that it should be forwarded to the Governing Body (see Appendix 2)

22.14 Any Other Notified Business

There was no further unreserved business to consider

22.15 Next Meeting

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on Tuesday 7 October 2014 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.