

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 24 March 2015 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mr R Jay (Chairperson), Professor T Scott (Principal), Mr M Murray and Mr K Nelson

In Attendance Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J Hunter

### **UNRESERVED BUSINESS**

#### **26.1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mr C Chan, Mrs J Eve and Mr A Kennedy.

#### **26.2 Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

#### **26.3 Minutes of Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Education Committee, held on 10 February 2015, were approved.

#### **26.4 Matters Arising**

26.4.1 Presentation on Marketing Activities (minute 25.8 f)).

The Committee received a presentation from Mrs B Crotty, Director of Planning and Customer Services, regarding Marketing Activities. At the outset she indicated that one of the most important marketing objectives was the provision of a standardised approach to admissions, public information and customer service to support the Curriculum offer.

Mrs Crotty informed the Committee that the Marketing Budget is £250k for 2014/2015. She indicated the main spend categories such as PR/Public Information (£25k), Design/Brand Consultancy (£60k) and Print Charges (£40k).

Members raised a number of issues such as:

- The cost of staff involved in marketing, which was estimated to be approximately £200k
- The need to communicate with high profile past students and the Alumni Association
- Marketing targets must be clearly defined and monitored
- Marketing and Sales training for relevant staff should be provided
- Balance of expenditure on print media vs digital media

The Principal noted that she had sought a breakdown of activities (targets) by marketing channel and a monthly planner of activities to Sept 2015. This report will be circulated to the members when available.

#### **26.5 Chairperson's Communications**

26.5.1 Level 2 Pearson Examinations

The Chair referred to concerns in respect of the recently received disappointing results from the Level 2 Pearson examinations (across the sector). This is the first year that the NI FE colleges have used this particular Pearson qualification, which differs from the previous award as it has an examination component as opposed to 100% assessment. In the circumstances

until NRC addresses the problem, it was proposed and **the Committee approved that the College covers the costs of a first resit for students, who have failed the exam.**

## **26.6 Correspondence**

There was no correspondence to report.

## **26.7 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 predicted year-end outturn is 6183 FLUs, which is 419 below the 2014/2015 target (6,602 FLUs). Concern was expressed that the variance had increased since the last meeting. Dr O'Mullan stated that there had been an increase following a College review of data after the DEL lift on 1 February 2015. It was also noted that there had been 165 full-time student withdrawals from 1 November 2014 to 13 March 2015; 20% had left to take up employment and 20% for health reasons. Attention was drawn to the high variances from target in respect of both full-time (-2.9% FLU against target equating to approximately 150 enrolments) and part-time (-0.4% FLU against target equating to approximately 200 enrolments) Priority Skills.
- b) Whole College Retention 2014/2015. The retention target is 92%; retention is 94.5% as at 13 March 2015.
- c) Mid Year Student Survey. Scores for the Mid Year Student Survey are above the average scores for 2013/2014 but below target for HE and FE; WBL and EF have met their targets. Dr O'Mullan highlighted the main strengths and the main areas for improvement identified as a result of the Survey.
- d) Student Focus Groups. Student Focus Group questions have been developed and circulated to managers facilitating the Groups. Reports are to be forwarded to the Quality Manager by 23 March 2015.
- e) Employer Feedback Survey. COM reported that an Employer Feedback Survey is being developed for the Sector.

## **26.8 Health Check Issue 1 2014/2015**

The Committee gave consideration to the following sections of the FE College Health Check Issue 1 2014/2015:

- a) Performance against CDP Curriculum Targets. NRC failed to meet its FE target (2013/2014) by 141 FLUs amounting to a loss of £479k and its HE target by 149 FLUs resulting in a lift of £506k. The College met its Essential Skills target.
- b) Retention, Achievement and Success. The College compares favourably with other Colleges in the Sector. It was noted, however, that full-cost recovery on some courses was lower than sector averages. The Principal noted that the SIP will review targets and resources in respect of income generation
- c) Risk Management. The Report summarised selected elements of the Risk Register for each college. Governors queried the reference to "a high risk rating regarding staff mix and further sought clarification on the NRC entry "the College does not have an appropriate mix of staff to support the delivery of developments in the curriculum, particularly in STEM/PSA areas and associated services in high quality and affordable and sustainable manner". The Principal added that this risk had been identified by the college and as a result actions are being taken to manage the risk through resource and succession planning; staff development and restructuring.

## 26.9 Quality Improvement

The SER prepared in advance of the CPD Scrutiny Visit for Continuous Professional Development was noted. The Principal drew attention to good practice and areas identified for improvement.

The Principal stated that CPD will be given greater focus and clear targets in the SIP.

## 26.10 Curriculum Planning

a) The Committee received a document setting out the curriculum strategy for 2015-2018 and identifying the type of provision offered at the College, by level and campus, and in response to local and regional demand. The Plan is presented under Further Education, Higher Education, Work-Based Learning, Business Development, Staffing and Technology Enhanced Learning. The NRC sees its staff as its most valuable asset in providing learners with a challenging and vocational relevant curriculum. Technical Enhanced Learning will be central to curriculum delivery and improving the student experience, retention and achievement.

The College's Curriculum will be delivered across 15 distinct vocational areas. The Plan provides a brief synopsis of the rationale for the provision and relevant development in these areas.

b) Curriculum Planning 2015/2016. Dr O'Mullan presented a paper informing the Committee of the planning issues relating to the College FLU Curriculum 2015/2016. This year the methodology for the annual CDP process has been revised by DEL, and NRC has been allocated a provisional FLU target and associated recurrent grant allocation. The FLU target for 2015/2016 is 6,077 FLU, 530 FLU less than the target for 2014/2015; the initial recurrent grant allocation for 2015/2016 is £20.661m, £1.4m less than the £22,076m for 2014/2015. Curriculum planning is ongoing to consider and decide how the College will deliver the revised FLU target.

Dr O'Mullan highlighted the following key challenges to the planning process using NRC year-end data:

- NRC is currently over-delivering its FE target for 2015/2016 by 260 FLU. The FE FLU target for 2015/2016 is a combination of a reduced target in full-time FE provision equating to up to @ 10 full-time courses and a reduced target for part-time provision, which takes account of the withdrawal of FLU funding for hobby and leisure classes equating to 75 FLUs for NRC in 2014/2015.
- NRC is under-delivering its HE target by 110 FLUs. The NRC FLU template sent to DEL was completed assuming no additional MaSN. The College Plan assumes 30 additional MaSN with a target of 362 enrolments (or @ 520 FLUs). It will be a challenge for the College to meet the part-time HE FLU target of 446 FLUs as the enrolments required are 150 more than the 2014/2015 actual.
- The ES FLU target is set by DEL to reflect departmental performance targets. The 2015/2016 FLU target of 421 is attainable based on 2014/2015 performance.

Dr O'Mullan stated that there was a requirement to deliver the reduced FLU target for 2015//2016 with correspondingly reduced staff cost. It was noted that a Workshop with CMT, HOS and Curriculum Managers was being arranged for after the Easter break to consider FLU allocations and further development of the curriculum plan. **The Committee supported the course of action being pursued by the College.**

Action: Dr O'Mullan will report back to the Education Committee on progress in relation to the 15/16 academic plan.

### **26.11 Student Council**

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

a) Library Pilot Scheme. Following consultation with the library staff and a suggestion from the Student Council, a one month pilot was launched in Ballymoney and Coleraine, where the library has been open from 8am for students to access computers with the desk open as usual from 8.45 am. Initial figures suggest that this has been a major success. Professor Scott advised the Committee that 124 new computers had been allocated to libraries. She mentioned that 766 new PCs had also been distributed to PC Labs and a further 250 to staff.

b) Events and Activities. The report includes a detailed listing of events and activities from January to March 2015.

c) The Chair drew attention to the establishment of a Christian Union and queried whether the College had any arrangements for non-Christian denominations. It was noted that the College had an Equality Officer. Dr O'Mullan undertook to enquire about arrangements.

### **26.12 Any Other Notified Business**

There was no other notified business.

### **26.13 Next Meeting**

The Chairperson reminded members that the next meeting of the Education Committee is scheduled for 5.30 pm on **Tuesday 19 May 2015** at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus.

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**R Jay, Chair**

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**JA Hunter, Secretary**