

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Wednesday, 22 March 2017 at Newtownabbey Campus, commencing at 5.00pm.

Present:

Mrs I Allison, Cllr J Brown, Mrs J Eve, Mr K Chambers, Mr H Crossey, Cllr W Hutchinson, Mr R Jay, Mr A Kennedy, Dr D Lennox, Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr B McCluggage, Mrs G McConnell, Ms C McKinney (Chair), Mr Nelson, Prof T Scott (Principal)

In Attendance:

Dr S Brankin, Mr M Higgins, Mr D Hewitt
Mrs C Robinson, Secretary

Welcome

The Chair welcomed Governing Body members and SLT to the meeting.

75.1 Apologies

Prof M McKinney.

75.2 Declaration of Interest

None.

75.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 February 2017 were approved.

Proposed: Mr A Kennedy

Seconded: Mr K Nelson

The summary of discussion on the workshop held on the 1 February 2017 was noted. A minor amendment to correct a reference to the former Department of Employment and Learning was noted.

75.4 Matters Arising

Prof Scott reported that the presentation on community engagement with the Councils scheduled for the March meeting had been deferred due to absence of illness leave of the senior manager responsible for the area. She indicated that work in this area was ongoing and that resources in the area were being reviewed to ensure the College would deliver on commitments.

Action: An update on community engagement would be presented at a future Governing Body meeting.

The Chair advised that any other matters arising would be addressed in the course of the meeting.

75.5 Chair's Communication

The Chair, on behalf of the governing body, extended sincere condolences to Mr McCluggage and his family on the death of his father.

75.6 Correspondence

Correspondence received since the last meeting was considered:

- i) DfE communication updating on new appointments to replace EA nominees was noted.
- ii) DfE communication regarding the Annual Provider Review Preliminary Assessment

Prof Scott provided an update on the revised funding methodology for FE colleges noting that this had previously been discussed with the Education Committee. Prof Scott also advised that the changes to the HEFCE and QA procedures may have implications for the timing of validation and

external reviews by Ulster University. She advised that she had been in contact with Professor Paul Bartholomew, PVC responsible for academic affairs to consider arrangements. The College was waiting on information in relation to the planning cycle. No implications were apparent at present.

Cllr Brown and Mrs Eve joined the meeting.

Mr McCluggage referred to the outcome identified in the correspondence from the Department in relation to the Annual Provider Review Preliminary Assessment and congratulated the College on getting through the preliminary assessment.

75.7 Principal's Report

The Governing Body noted the Principal's report along with additional information on key items highlighted by Prof Scott.

ETI Inspection – the Principal and Mr Jay had attended the final report back session following the recent ETI inspection. The feedback had been pleasing with significant positive comments and an overall outcome that indicated the inspectorate had confidence in the processes in place. The two areas highlighted for improvement by the inspectors had been identified internally prior to commencement of the inspection. The final report was expected in a matter of weeks.

The Governing Body congratulated the College on its approach to the inspection and the excellent outcome. The Chair thanked Mr Jay for representing the Governing Body during the inspection.

Recruitment, application and enrolment 2017/18 – Prof Scott referred to the events and marketing directed at recruitment for the coming year and noted the positive results achieved. She reported on the benefits of the online EduRank system noting that NRC was now ranked at the top of NI Colleges in relation to activity on the website.

Estates Strategy and Capital Plan – Prof Scott reported that the purchase of additional land in Coleraine had been completed and the contract had been signed.

The Governing Body acknowledged the challenges presented and congratulated Prof Scott on closing the deal before year end.

Mr Jay referred back to the ETI inspection and extended thanks to Mr Taggart and other staff involved in preparing for and working with the inspection team. He praised the team on the good relationship established with the inspectors. Mr Jay also drew attention to the final paragraph in the Principal's report and the ETI team's commendation of leadership in improving quality. He congratulated SLT on the outcome and wished them well in addressing the areas requiring further work.

Dr Lennox joined the meeting.

Prof Scott reiterated that the final report on the inspection was expected shortly. Feedback would be provided and an action plan would be requested. The action plan prepared for the quality improvement plan would be recalibrated for the inspectors.

Mr Crossey acknowledged the positive aspects of the inspection and congratulated staff on the considerable progress achieved. Mr Chambers concurred with colleagues comments and also commended the work undertaken in achieving an 85% increase in applications on the previous year.

Mr Higgins responded to Mr Chamber's query about a Project Execution Plan for the New Build project. He indicated that a plan was in place and presented to the Estates Project Board. He advised that the document could be shared with the Governing Body. A Gateway Report had been presented to the Audit and Risk Committee at its last meeting and would be considered at the forthcoming Resources Committee meeting.

The Chair and Mr McCluggage agreed that the Governing Body should receive a full report before the project evaluation plan was finalised.

Mr Higgins referred to a presentation due to be made to the Causeway Coast and Glens Council which could be circulated to the Governing Body in due course.

The Governing Body noted the Principal's update on the Schedule of Accommodation and programme of stakeholder engagement. The part time appointment of external specialist Curriculum advisor, Paul Kane was noted.

Mrs Allison joined the meeting.

Action: The Governing Body agreed that a presentation would be scheduled in June to allow further discussion of the New Build Project.

75.8 Re-appointment of Co-opted Member

The Chair welcomed Mrs Eve back to the Governing body. She advised that she had sought approval from members who had agreed to Mrs J Eve's re-appointment for a second term as co-opted member.

The decision was ratified by the Governing Body.

Proposed: Dr Lennox

Seconded: Mr Chambers

75.9 Strategic Improvement Plan

Prof Scott referred to the KPI report circulated which covered KPIs 1, 5, 10 and 11.

KPI 1: Ensuring student recruitment meets enrolment targets and students successfully complete their programme of study.

Professor Scott reported that the Education Committee had considered the FLU figures at a recent meeting and the year end narrative had been updated since then. Essential skills was below target but work on improving this through additionality was ongoing. The outturn for retention was positive with figures broadly in line with targets. Work on maintaining/improving retention was ongoing and had been reinforced with staff through recent workshops, communications and the staff conference. A new dashboard system was currently being trialed which would provide information/alerts on a daily basis to managers. Prof Scott noted that the Head of Student Experience had presented to the Education Committee on developments in respect of improving retention.

KPI 5: Delivering Long Term Financial Sustainability

Mr Higgins reported that the RAG status had been identified as amber. The College was operating within the Department's tolerance level. Staff costs as a percentage of income were above target as income had reduced. The reduction in student numbers reflected a sector wide trend, with some Colleges reporting more than 2% below target. There was significant pressure on 2016/17 budget which was likely to carry on into 2017/18. Some issues with CPD had impacted on procurement but these had been resolved so that expenditure in IT and Estates was expected to be in line with target for year end. The purchase of the additional land in Coleraine had been finalised and the College was on target to spend all capital money. The Resources Committee would consider the 2017/18 projections and reallocate budgets accordingly.

Dr Lennox sought further information on the CPD matter. Mr Higgins summarised issues arising with the new guidance on procurement received by all ALBs, which had directed that existing frameworks used directly by Colleges previously must all be done through CPD. Concern about the additional costs associated with using CPD had been brought to the attention of the Department.

Prof Scott responded to Mr Chamber's queries on enrolment targets, highlighting that the process of agreement had been revised. She also reiterated reasons why Colleges were experiencing difficulty in meeting enrolment targets and indicated that the Department had been advised of the implications of provision delivered at CAFRE

KPI 10: Developing Strategic Partnerships

Dr Brankin reported that 10 partnerships were currently in place and he was confident that the target of 12 would be achieved by year end. He advised that while most of the partnerships were presently within engineering, opportunities to broaden this were being investigated. As a key part of the strategy, relationships with IT companies would remain a focus for development.

KPI 11: Diversifying Income

Members noted there was no change with regard to diversifying income. Prof Scott was confident that an increased income could be realised in the coming year. Work in this area was ongoing and an update would be provided at a later date.

75.10 Health Check

i) 2015/16 Year End Report – Issue 5

Mr Higgins reported that the year-end report had been re-issued by the Department.

ii) 2016/17 – Issue 1

The Governing Body noted the first report for the current year.

Mr Higgins commented on the financial and FLU information noting the College's position in relation to other Colleges. He also drew attention to the trend in student numbers across NI Colleges.

Mr Higgins reported that a review of the Health Check had been commissioned by Department. College Finance Officers would be involved in the review and the usefulness of the report would be considered. The Governing Body would be advised of the outcome.

Prof Scott provided additional information to clarify the College's position in relation to part time enrolment in response to Mr McCluggage's query. She indicated that Paul Kane, external advisor would be involved in a piece of work scheduled to look at measuring progression between level 3 and 4 courses.

Prof Scott also responded to comments on staff costs and the ratio of part time to full time staff. She advised that there was ongoing work within this area to readdress the over reliance on part time staff.

Mr Hewitt outlined the elements of the ongoing review of part time/full time, temporary/permanent roles and the optimisation of staff. He advised that a report was being presented at the next Resources Committee meeting.

75.11 Audit & Risk Committee

Dr Lennox referred to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2017 and summarised the business addressed. He noted the comprehensive presentation on the Gateway Review of New Build Project provided by the Project Manager and outlined the discussion on the Internal Audit Review of the SIP commissioned by the Committee on the back of comments in the NIAO Report to Those Charge with Governance.

Dr Lennox stated that the review had been scheduled in advance of a piece of work by NIAO and had been more detailed than initially expected. The final report had been comprehensive and the Committee has considered the outcome to be very positive. SLT, Committee Chairs and members of the SIP Committee had also had a discussion on the report at the SIP Committee meeting on 1 March 2017 prior to the A&R meeting.

Dr Lennox indicated that the NIAO had commenced its marking study. He outlined what was involved in a marking study and noted that the final report would inform the C&AGs decision on whether a more detailed review would be required. The report would not be published and would be shared with SLT before being finalised.

Dr Brankin provided an update on interaction with NIAO and the information requested by. A number of meetings had been held but no feedback had been provided as yet.

The GB Chair indicated that due to the departure of several GB members it had been necessary to refresh the membership of the Audit and Risk Committee. She advised that Mrs Allison and Mr McCluggage had agreed to join the Committee. Members approved the change in membership.

Dr Lennox thanked Cllr Brown for his contribution to the Audit and Risk Committee and welcomed Mrs Allison and Mr McCluggage to the Committee. He noted that Mr McCluggage's position on the New Build Project Board would be beneficial to the Committee.

Mr McCluggage noted that in his view the timing and sensitivities in respect of the NIAO work created further work for the management team in a period of very demanding SLT work streams already underway.

Mr Crossey advised that he had received a copy of the KPMG report and had been reassured by the work done and the outcome. He added that it was important to recognise the additional work placed on SLT and staff as a result of the overlap of the reviews, the ETI inspection and other previously scheduled key events. Members acknowledged the points made and thanked the SLT for their continued hard work and commitment.

The draft minutes of the meetings on 9 March 2017 were noted by the Governing Body.

75.12 Education Committee

Mr Jay provided a verbal report on the February meeting of the Education Committee. He noted that there had been several important items for discussion along with a number of useful presentations which had resulted in a longer meeting than usual. He highlighted key discussions on KPI 1, the ETI inspection and the Safeguarding report.

Attention was directed to the interim safeguarding annual report circulated. Mr Jay also referred to a previous presentation to the Governing Body by Mr S McCartney, NRC Safeguarding Officer and the online safeguarding training which Governing Body members would be invited to complete.

Members noted that as the Governor responsible for safeguarding Mr Jay had signed off the evaluation return on behalf of the Governing Body.

Mr Jay indicated that the comprehensive presentations on the Marketing and Communication Strategy and HE provision had been useful and had prompted interesting discussion. Management had undertaken to engage with the Department on HLA/Foundation Degree provision and would report back to the Committee.

An outline of the revised approach to curriculum planning had been presented and the provisional FLU enrolment profile for the coming year had been considered and approved by the Committee.

Prof Scott reported that the profile had subsequently been submitted to the Department and there had been no further correspondence on the matter. The Governing Body would be updated when the process had been clarified by the Department.

The draft minute of the Education Committee held on 22 February 2017 was noted by the Governing Body. An amendment under item 32.11 was agreed.

Prof Scott responded to a query on the safeguarding instances reported. She advised that there were no concerns and that the Head of Student Services was responsible for introducing an online training course.

75.13 Any Other Business

Prof Scott confirmed that Governing Body members would receive the New Build presentation in advance of the meeting with Causeway & Glens Council on 9 May 2017.

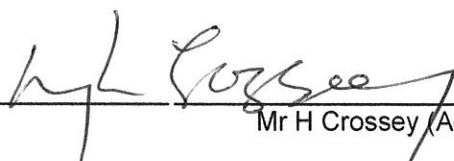
75.14 Date of Next Meeting

The Chair advised that following discussion with senior management it had been agreed that the next meeting planned for Wednesday, 26 April 2017 was not required. Members noted and agreed that the business reporting schedule which took in the Easter recess, did not justify a full meeting on that date.


Members also noted that the SIP and A&R committee meetings scheduled for the 12 April 2017 had been removed from the calendar. Further meeting dates would be circulated to members as soon as possible.

Dr Lennox proposed that the A&R Committee meeting might be rescheduled to the 26 April 2017 at 5.15pm and asked members to hold the date. The Secretary would confirm if the meeting would go ahead at the earliest convenience.

The unreserved business meeting ended at 6.40pm



Mr H Crossey (Acting Chair)



Mrs C Robinson (Secretary)

Date 18/5/2017
18 May 2017