

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at 5.00 pm on 13 January 2010 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mrs K Collins (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mrs A M Campbell, Rev T Jamieson, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden, Mr K Nelson, Ms C O'Neill, Mrs U O'Kane, Mrs A Rankin and Mr A Watt.

In Attendance Mr L Anderson, Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J A Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

19.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr S Davidson, Ms J Fullerton, Mrs C Taylor and Ms L Wallis.

The Chairperson welcomed Mr Lewis Anderson, the Students' Union representative, who was attending the meeting in an 'in attendance' capacity. AccessNI clearance is required before he can be appointed as a Student Governor.

19.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

19.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 25 November 2009 were approved.

19.4 Matters Arising

19.4.1 Funding: Programme Led Apprenticeships (minute 18.4.2)

The Governing Body at its last meeting noted that the programme, introduced as a contingency measure, was involving the College in additional expenses. The Governing Body noted that negotiations were still proceeding with the Department regarding funding.

19.4.2 Student Governor (minute 18.4.4)

Mr L Anderson stated that, as Student President he wished to represent all students in a positive way and in particular on the Governing Body He informed Governors that earlier in the day he had held the first meeting of the Student Vice-Presidents from Coleraine and Newtownabbey. The Director advised the Governing Body that Mr Anderson and the Student Vice Presidents had addressed the congregation at recent Further Education Graduation Ceremonies on behalf of the Student Body and had spoken well.

19.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairperson's communications.

19.6 Director's Report

The Director drew Members' attention to:

a) Estate Strategy. The Director stated that he and the Deputy Director Planning and Resources and representatives from the Southern Regional College (SRC) had attended a meeting at the Department for Employment and Learning. The NRC and SRC had been informed that they would be able to take the initial step regarding their application for new builds (in the case of NRC at Coleraine and Ballymena). The Department advised that the project would proceed as a joint undertaking with the SRC. This would require the submission of a Strategic Outline Case (SOC) to the Department by 31 March 2010. The Director said that it would be for the Department of Finance and Personnel to decide whether the joint project should progress to the next stage. The Director added that he would be content to work with SRC on the project.

19.7 Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report.

19.8 Minutes of the Education Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 30 November 2009. The Governing Body noted that the following topics had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Action Plan 2009/2010. The Committee approved an Action Plan for 2009/2010, which would enable it to review its effectiveness at its final meeting in June;

b) Part-Time Enrolments. The Committee received a paper detailing figures for part-time enrolments for 2006/2007 to 2009/2010. In general the figures show a small decline in the region of 7% compared with enrolments for the previous year. Part-time vocational enrolments had remained constant but the non-vocational figures had dropped by 25%. It was noted that there had been a large decline in enrolments in off-campus sites at Newtownabbey and Ballymena as arrangements for classes were too expensive making the provision unviable. The Committee discussed how to reverse the downward trend; it was suggested that Marketing was critical to the promotion of part-time courses. It was noted, however, that it was essential to achieve a balance between the provision of part-time courses and affordability. The Committee agreed that the Deputy Director Curriculum should prepare options for increasing part-time enrolments for discussion at a future meeting.

The Director advised Members that there had been a change in the balance of provision over the last three years and that the College must endeavour to reverse the trend.

19.9 Minutes of Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 1 December 2009. The Governing Body noted that the following topics had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Sale of Land at Larne. The Committee noted that a Payment Plan was being arranged for the sale of land at Larne to the Larne YMCA. It also noted the position regarding the sale of lease of Playing Fields at Larne to the Larne Grammar School. The NRC solicitors need to be 'reasonably' satisfied that the College owns the land before issuing the cheque received for it from Larne Grammar School.

b) New Skills Centre, Newtownabbey. The Committee noted that there had been a delay in the refurbishment of the Kitchen area due to a dispute with Northern Ireland Electricity. To minimise the time delay and costs, it was proposed to rent a new temporary mobile kitchen but the rental cost, £50,000, had proved prohibitive. An alternative method had been devised, which would involve an outlay of £4,000 for every week in excess of the contract completion period. It was noted that NIE had now commenced work on the transformer that had delayed the refurbishment and the delay in the contract was estimated to be in the region of six weeks.

The Committee had also discussed whether the contract should remain signed 'under hand' or extended to 'under seal' to provide a further six years guarantee; it asked for the Project Board to consider the matter and make a recommendation to the Governing Body on 13 January 2010. The Project Board agreed that the contract should remain signed 'under hand', as an extension to 'under seal' would not provide value for money. The Project Board stressed that a clear examination with a due diligence report/technical survey should be carried out in Year 5.

The Governing Body approved the recommendation from the Project Board that the contract should continue to be sealed 'under hand' and that a Due Diligence Report/Technical Survey be carried out in Year 5.

c) Monthly Management Accounts. The Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 October 2009 indicate that the College had a surplus of £196k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £523k, which was £634k ahead of budget. The bank balance as at 31 October 2009 was £6.3 million.

The Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 30 November 2009 appear as a separate item on the agenda (see item 19.13).

d) Data Protection Policy. The Committee approved and **the Governing Body endorsed the revised Data Protection Policy.**

18.10 Minutes of Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 30 November 2009. The Governing Body noted that the following topics had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Lecturers' Pay Agreement. The Committee noted that there were still some issues to be resolved before the new contract is signed. The Director informed the Governing Body that these issues had now been resolved and a final agreement had been reached. Members of staff were currently in the process of signing the new contract and it was planned to pay back-pay by the end of January 2010;

b) Key Performance Indicators. The Committee considered a number of KPIs, which had been prepared by the Deputy Director Planning and Resources. The Committee agreed that:

i) The KPIs relating to Staff Absence, Lecturing Staff Efficiency, Staff Costs Expenditure and Staff Costs Income should be retained;

ii) KPIs should be drafted to state current ratios, set targets and describe current progress including Sector standards. The Executive Management Team should be requested to assist in formulating the KPIs.

c) Further and Higher Education Benchmarking . The Committee considered the Further and Higher Education Benchmarking Report, based on financial information for the year to 31 July 2009, and noted in particular staffing issues. The Director informed the Committee that this was the first time that statistics had been assembled for all six colleges enabling direct comparisons to be made. Anomalies in the collection of data rendered it of limited use but future enhancements could make it a valuable tool for benchmarking.

19.11 Strategic Review Workshop

The Director thanked Governors for their commitment and input to the Strategic Review Workshop, which had been held prior to the meeting of the Governing Body to address the Governing Body's vision or aspiration for the College. He stated that the Workshop had identified a number of key concepts to be incorporated in the College's Aspiration Statement. He undertook to draft the Statement and disseminate it to Governors for comment with a view to having it approved at the next meeting of the Governing Body on 3 March 2010.

The Chairperson thanked the Director for an informative workshop.

19.12 Effectiveness of Governing Body

The Governing Body noted that during one of its meetings on 7 October 2009 a Member stated that much of the business transacted at Governing Body meetings was operational rather than strategic. It was suggested that more time should be devoted to the strategic direction of the College rather than rehearsing discussions that had already taken place at the Committee stage. It was proposed that the structure, remit and effectiveness of the Governing Body should be discussed at its January meeting with a view to reducing the volume of operational material to be considered at meetings of the Governing Body.

Governors received a paper regarding the effectiveness of the Governing Body to which was attached the following documents:

a) Duties and Powers of Governing Body. The Governing Body noted that it was not permitted by the Articles of Government to delegate responsibility for a number of matters detailed in the paper;

b) Terms of Reference of the Audit Committee, Education Committee, Finance and General Purposes Committee and Staffing Committee. Governors were reminded that the Terms had been reviewed recently by Committees and approved by the Governing Body.

The Governing Body noted that papers presented to the Board and Committees have cover sheets attached alerting Governors to salient matters and informing them whether issues are of note or whether action is required. The Chairperson said that Governors had a responsibility to read papers prior to meetings and to raise only key issues. Consideration was given to an alternative means of conducting business **but it was agreed to continue with the present system.**

The Director reminded Governors that the Department measures annually the effectiveness of the Governing Body; it appraises the effectiveness of the Chairperson and requires the Chairperson to submit an appraisal form in respect of each Governor. He suggested that the Governing Body should conduct a Self Evaluation Review (SER), which was the method used for the evaluation of performance throughout the College.

The Governing Body agreed that the Director and Secretary should progress the evaluation of Governing Body performance making use of SER.

19.13 Monthly Management Accounts

The Governing Body received the Monthly Management Accounts for the period ended 30 November 2009, which indicate that the College has a deficit of £281k on continuing operations (338k better than budget) and an historic surplus of £154k.

The Director of Finance indicated that the Bank Balance stood at £5.5 million but that staff back-pay would have cash implications.

19.14 Fees Policy and Regulations 2010/2011

The Governing Body received a draft paper detailing the College's Fees Policy and Regulations for 2010/2011. It noted that the paper highlighted a number of areas, which had still to be discussed and resolved at the meeting of the Executive Management Team on 18 January 2010.

The Deputy Director Support and Development provided Governors with a summary of Changes to the Fees Regulations and the **Governing Body approved the College's Fees Policy and Regulations for 2010/2011.**

A Member queried whether the document was widely publicised and suggested that the College should combine the Fees Policy and Regulations rather than presenting them as separate documents. She was advised that the documents were published widely on the staff and student intranet and extracts were included in the prospectus. She was also advised that the documents were kept separate as the Policy remained essentially the same from year to year but the Regulations were subject to annual adjustments. The Deputy Director Support and Development agreed to incorporate minor amendments proposed to the Fees Policy.

A member stressed the need for the College to be competitive with the local market in regards to fees. He was assured that a check was made on a regular basis.

19.15 Any Other Notified Business

There was no notified business to transact.

18.16 Next Meeting

The Governing Body noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body was scheduled for Wednesday 10 March 2010 at the Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus. It was further noted that a suggestion had been made to bring the meeting forward to 3 March 2010 to enable the Governing Body to consider and approve the Business Improvement Plan and the College Development Plan for submission to the Department around the end of February 2010. **The Governing Body agreed that that the next meeting should be held on Wednesday 3 March 2010 at 5.00 pm at the Ballymena campus.**