

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at 5.30 pm on 18 April 2012 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mr G Gilpin (Chairman), Mr T Neilands (Director), Alderman J Brown, Councillor J Currie, Mr I Goldsworthy, Dr D Lennox, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden and Mr K Nelson.

In Attendance Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Dr C O'Mullan and Mr J A Hunter. Dr M Mclvor (DEL) attended the meeting to undertake the appraisal of the Chairman

Pre-Meeting Reception

Governors attended a small reception, prior to the meeting of the Governing Body, to meet and congratulate Emma McQuilken, a recipient of the J P McManus All Ireland Scholarship.

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

38.1 Presentation Finger Print Learning

The Governing Body received a presentation from Dr Brian Cummins and Dr John Kelly regarding Finger Print Learning, which provided the following details:

a) EntreBRAINeur Phase 1. Phase 1 identified a clear pattern of learning preference among a sample of 55 Northern Ireland entrepreneurs; right-brained dominance, non-conforming and concrete random thinking were the norm. This is most visible as non-conformity. Phase 1 suggested that in order to establish an enterprise culture in Northern Ireland, right-brained dominance must be valued and supported.

b) EntreBRAINeur Phase 2. Phase 2 addressed important questions regarding the relationship between mainstream education and fostering entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour. To answer these questions a survey was undertaken at the Northern Regional College of 677 students; 6 staff focus groups interviews and 4 student focus group interviews were also held.

c) Findings. A significant proportion of the students displayed learning preferences common to the entrepreneurs in the Phase 1 study; 5% of students demonstrated 'very strong' entrepreneurial learning preferences and 25% 'strong' entrepreneurial learning preferences. This would suggest a more right-brained approach to teaching and learning is required. There is genuine interest to be able to cater for a wide range of learning styles in the FE sector but this interest is not matched by educational policy, where the goal is overwhelmingly to 'get students through' external assessment.

d) Recommendations. There is a need to identify students entering FE Colleges with entrepreneurial potential and to develop curriculum and teaching methods to cater for this category of learner. It is important to create conditions in which extra-curricular activity is genuinely valued alongside academic studies. There is a need to foster more cooperation and communication between education and entrepreneurs. Consideration needs to be given to developing entrepreneurship education as a core curricular area and the balance between left and right-brained approaches needs to be addressed in education policy forums.

e) Conclusion. The need for entrepreneurs as essential to the economic vitality of the nation is becoming more recognised but a vision of entrepreneurship is still lacking.

During discussion the Chairman sought advice as to the way forward. He was informed that Dr Cummins and Dr Kelly would be giving a presentation to DEL on 18 May 2012.

Dr Cummins and Dr Kelly thanked the management, staff and students of the College for their contribution to the research project. They also thanked DEL as the commissioning and funding body for the research. They also indicated that they would appreciate any comments from Governors and the Executive Management Team regarding the project.

The Chairman thanked Dr Cummins and Dr Kelly for an informative presentation.

38.2 Apologies & Membership

a) Apologies. Apologies have been received from Ms S Cassidy, Mrs K Collins, Mr S Davidson, Mr R Jay, Mr S McCartney, Mrs A Rankin and Mrs C Taylor.

b) Appointment of Governors. A communication had been received from DEL on 5 April 2012 indicating that Alderman James Brown and Councillor James Currie have been appointed as members of the Governing Body for the period from 3 April 2012 to 2 April 2016. The Chairman welcomed both Alderman Brown and Councillor Currie to the meeting.

38.3 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

38.4 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held 14 March 2012 were approved.

38.5 Matters Arising

38.5.1 Code of Governance (minute 37.6).

Following the presentation from the Department (29 February 2012) on the Code of Governance the Governing Body agreed that the Chairman should write to the Department drawing attention to a number of concerns expressed by members.

The Chairman reported that he had received a response from Mr Kenny in which he points out that the Code of Governance does not increase Governors' responsibilities but simply brings them together in one place. Mr Kenny indicates that the Department would be happy to meet with the Governing Body to discuss matters.

The Chairman advised that the Department had been taking forward a number of other recommendations of the Review of Governance:

a) Knowledge, Skills and Competence. The Review proposed that the knowledge, skills and competencies required of the Governing Body should be identified and that these should inform the recruitment, development and assessment of Governors. A detailed breakdown of the knowledge, skills and competencies has been provided under four sections: knowledge required of a Governor; professional background required; competency framework for Governors, which will form the basis of recruitment and assessment of members and chairs; and the assessment process to be adopted in order to remain consistent with the competency framework. It was noted that the Department would be pleased to receive any comments before 30 April 2012.

During discussions queries were raised as to how DEL could ensure consistency in relation to the assessment process and the resources available for the training and development of Governors across the sector. Reservations were expressed in regard to the definitions of terms, such as 'competent' and 'highly competent' in the assessment forms.

It was agreed that Governors should be invited to contribute comments individually regarding the knowledge, skills and competencies required of the Governing Body.

b) Governors' Council. The review recommended that there should be a Governors' Council to provide an opportunity for individual members of Governing Bodies to engage with officials in the Department on matters of importance to the Sector. It was noted that a number of details concerning the operation of the Council would need to be agreed such as the frequency of meetings, the determination of agendas, DEL representation, the provision of administrative support and the election of office bearers.

c) Representation on the Governing Body. It was noted that the Department's way forward is to:

(i) Abolish all categories of Governing Body membership with the exception of the Principal and co-opted members;

(ii) Appoint all Members through open, public competition; and

(iii) Introduce new representational mechanisms (staff forum and student forum) for staff and student engagement with the Governing Body.

It was noted that DEL would welcome comments from Governing Bodies on representation on the Governing Body.

d) Other Review Recommendations. Other recommendations have been implemented or are in the process of implementation such as: the assessment of college performance (the Health Check); the revision of the format of CDPs to reflect the Programme for Government; the organisation and management of FE on a Sector wide basis; and DEL's interface with the FE Sector in terms of its own organisation and communications.

It was agreed that the recommendations, referred to at sections a), b) and c) above, should be an item for discussion at the next meeting of the Governing Body.

38.6 Chairman's Communications

The Chairman reported that he had attended a number of meetings since the last meeting of the Governing Body. He advised Governors that he would be attending a two-day think tank regarding the regeneration of the North Coast. He made mention of a future meeting with the developer of the proposed golf course/hotel complex at the Giant's Causeway. He added that the development had potential for the College.

38.7 Director's Report

The Director in presenting his Report made reference to:

a) ApprenticeshipsNI/Training for Success Recontracting. The Director stated that the College had been informed that the tendering process had been concluded and that NRC had been awarded contracts in all of the areas of its submission. He advised the Governing Body, however, that the award of the contract had now been suspended due to a legal challenge. The current contract would be extended on a weekly basis. This would have important implications for the College unless the matter was resolved quickly.

b) Sports Academies. The launch of the Michael Hughes Soccer Academy on 16 March 2012 attracted some useful media coverage and recruitment is now underway. The arrangements for the launch of the GAA Academy have now been confirmed. This will take place in Magherafelt on Tuesday 24 April at 11.00 am. As previously reported these new initiatives mean that the College is now involved in partnerships with three Sports Academies in golf, soccer and GAA.

c) Staff Celebration Event. The College's third annual Staff Celebration event will be held on Friday 27 April 2012 in the Tullyglass Hotel, Ballymena. This year the College will be recognising staff achievement in the areas of Continuous Professional Development, Study

Visits and support for learners in Worldskills and other competitions. It was noted that the Chairman would be attending the event.

d) Celebration of FE Awards. The Minister for Employment and Learning, Dr Stephen Farry, is hosting a celebration event in the Long Gallery in Stormont on 18 May 2012 to recognise all of the awards won by FE Colleges over the past year. The specific awards won by NRC, the 2011 UTV Business Eye Award in Partnership with Ryobi Aluminium Castings and the 2011 Apprentice of the Year Partnership Award with Michelin, will be recognised at the event.

e) Student Successes. The Governing Body noted that Emma McQuilkin had achieved a J P McManus Scholarship award and Ryan Young, a previous recipient of the award, had won an Alumni Academic Excellence Award at the University of Ulster.

NRC students have had a number of successes at the recent Northern Ireland Skillbuild finals (2 gold and 2 bronze medals) and the College has been informed that it has been short-listed in this year's Apprentice of the Year Awards in the Innovation in Partnership category. The College's partner on this occasion is Schrader Electronics. A Member suggested that it would be important for the College to maintain contact with previous students. The Director advised that the College intended to establish an Alumni Society with this in mind. The Chairman asked for the Director to convey the congratulations of the Governing Body to members of staff, who had contributed to the success of these students.

f) Student Radio. It was noted that a student radio would be launched at the Newtownabbey Campus on Monday 23 April 2012.

38.8 Correspondence

It was noted that correspondence had been received from DEL, dated 13 April 2012, regarding the potential impact and implications of the decision of the Office of National Statistics (ONS) to reclassify the further education colleges as within the public sector. The Department has carried out a scoping exercise to identify all the key elements and potential implications relating to reclassification in order to establish a formal project that will consider the impact and effect of these key issues on the sector. Seven main project streams have been identified and roles and responsibilities for taking each strand forward have been allocated within the Department.

It was noted that the current Financial Memorandum is still valid and should be complied with until Colleges are advised otherwise.

38.9 Education Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 20 March 2012. In presenting the minutes, in the absence of the Chairperson, Mr Nelson highlighted the minute relating to the Funded Learning Unit Bid. He said that a bi-lateral meeting of representatives from DEL and the College had taken place on 8 March 2012 to discuss the bid and to determine the allocation of funding for 2012/2013. The College awaits the outcome. It was noted that NRC had the lowest HE full-time FLU allocation in the Sector and this had financial implications for the College. The Committee agreed that a campaign should be mounted with a view to increasing its FLU allocation. The Director advised that a paper would be prepared for the next meeting regarding this matter.

The minutes indicate that the following matters were also considered at the meeting:

a) Faculty Presentation. The Committee received a presentation from Ms C O'Neill, Head of Economic Engagement, who provided details of the work of her Department;

b) Education and Training Inspectorate Scrutiny Inspection. During the feedback session, attended by two members of the Governing Body, the Inspectors indicated that they had confidence in the College's self-evaluation and quality improvement process. They identified a number of strengths and highlighted two areas for improvement relating to the need for first-

hand evidence of the quality of teaching and learning and feedback from employers, staff and students to inform the self-evaluation and quality improvement process;

c) Performance Management to Support Continuous Improvement. The Committee received a Report, which referred to a Performance Management Workshop held on 2 March 2012 to identify how managers contribute to the performance management culture and to promote the use of core-college MIS data and reports. The Workshop also gave consideration to a recent proposal from DEL to impose financial penalties in relation to courses, where the success rate falls into the lower quintiles. The Deputy Director Curriculum provided details of NRC courses, where the success rate fell below 60% in any given year since 2008/2009. By 2010/2011 the number of courses had decreased to eight, which represented 5% of the total final year courses.

d) Whole College Self Evaluation Review. The Committee noted the Whole College Self Evaluation Review and Quality Improvement Plan, which had been submitted to DEL on 29 February 2012.

The Report consists of three sections, which have been evaluated as follows:

- i) Leadership and Management (Grade 2 – Very Good);
- ii) Quality of Provision for Learning (Grade 3 – Good); and
- iii) Achievements and Standards (Grade 3 – Good).

The College overall grade has been evaluated internally as Grade 3 (Good).

e) Training Improving Quality: Raising Standards. The Committee received the Training IQRS Report, which provided a detailed account of the training provision at the College. It was noted that the document would be a useful source of information for managers as much of the information provided was not available on the MIS. The Committee approved the document for submission to DEL.

f) Investors In People. The Committee noted that the IIP reassessment is scheduled for 14 May 2012;

g) FE College Health Check Report. The Committee received the FE College Health Check Report based on information available at the end of Quarter I of 2011/2012. The Committee noted that the Report makes a number of comments regarding the College's performance including:

- a) Staff cost ratios, as a percentage of income, are the highest in the Sector
- b) Estate costs are below the sector average, which reflects the efforts of College management to make efficiencies
- c) The College has the second highest diversity of income figure in the sector, demonstrating that it is not as reliant on DEL income as some other colleges
- d) Overall retention, achievement and success figures show a significant improvement from the previous year and are broadly in line with the sector average.

38.10 Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 28 March 2012. Dr Lennox, in the absence of the Chairperson, highlighted the following issues arising from the minutes:

a) Monthly Management Accounts. The Committee noted the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 29 February 2012. The Accounts indicate that the College has an historic cost surplus of £668k, which is £85k more than budget. The Bank Balance as at 29 February 2012 was £3.4 million.

b) Estate Issues. The Committee received a Report providing an update regarding estate issues relating to:

i) Outline Business Case. It was noted that the schedule of accommodation had been completed on 31 January 2012. A meeting with DEL representatives had been arranged for 29 March 2012 to discuss the schedule and any further requirements for the appointment of consultants. It was also noted that the Project Board had had a meeting with the Strategic Investment Board on 15 March 2012, which confirmed that the process being used for the construction of data is valid.

ii) Larne Adult Education Centre. A tenant has been identified for the Centre and a lease is being drafted with a start date of 1 July 2012. It was noted that the new tenants had had a Board meeting on 18 April 2012.

iii) Antrim Campus. All documentation has been forwarded to the Land & Property Services and the disposal process is progressing smoothly.

iv) Portrush. There has been no further progress since the meetings of the Land Disposal Committee on 4 January and 10 January 2012.

v) Station Road, Newtownabbey. There has been no further progress since the meetings of the Land Disposal Committee on 4 January and 10 January 2012. It was noted that planning permission would enhance the price of the plot but to obtain permission it would be necessary to acquire the services of consultants, involving considerable expense.

vi) Maintenance Matters. No funding is available in respect of the bid for capital funds. DEL has advised that the cost of the Buildings Condition Survey could not be recovered from the receipts of land sales. The cost, £50,000, was considered too high.

c) Single Action Procurements. The Committee received a Report, which provided details of Single Action Procurements less than £5,000 and Single Action Procurements in excess of £5,000 during February 2012.

d) Banking Mandates. The Committee approved the opening of accounts with the First Trust Bank with effect from 1 May 2012 and agreed that Banking Mandates should be signed by the Chairperson and the Secretary.

e) Reclassification of Further Education College. The Committee noted correspondence from DEL, dated 13 February 2012, regarding the reclassification of FE Colleges

The Director said that there were important issues relating to college autonomy and governance, arising from the reclassification. He added that issues such as the dissolution of DEL, the introduction of shared issues and the review of governance were intertwined with the reclassification of colleges. It was important for colleges to have clarity; Colleges Northern Ireland (CNI) intended to prepare a position paper in the near future.

f) Funded Learning Unit (FLU) Bid. The Director of Finance provided details of Sector HE Enrolments for 2011/2012, which had been considered by the Education Committee on 20 March 2012. The Committee supported the resolution of the Education Committee that the College should mount a campaign with a view to increasing its FLU allocation.

38.11 Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 28 March 2012. In presenting the minutes Mr Goldsworthy drew attention to the following topics:

a) Investors In People. The Committee noted that the IIP reassessment would be on 14 May 2012.

b) Staff Appraisal. The Committee noted that the College had three schemes in operation: the scheme for non-teaching staff agreed by the Non-Teaching Staff Negotiating Committee in 2005; the scheme for academic staff up to Head of Department grade agreed by the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee in 2009; and a local appraisal process for the Director and Deputy Directors. The scheme for academic staff appraisal included observation of one lesson in the classroom during a two-year period.

In response to a query from a Governor, the Director stressed the need for classroom observation; he said that the College was attempting to establish classroom observation, on a voluntary basis, as part of the Improving Quality process. The criteria used for classroom observation were the same as used by ETI.

c) Continuous Professional Development. The Committee received the Continuous Professional Development Activity Report for 2010/2011, which contains comparative information about both internal and external activity during 2008/2009, 2009/2010 and 2010/2011. It also includes information on the first whole college staff development days that were organised on the 17 & 18 February 2011, when several workshops were offered to staff. The feedback from the development days was positive

In the academic year 2010/2011 members of staff within the Northern Regional College attended over 421 different internal and external continuous professional development events. All members of staff are eligible to attend. It was noted that the total investment in training for the year up to 23 March 2012 amounted to £ 480,000.

d) Staff Absenteeism. The Committee received a copy of the Staff Absentee Report providing sickness absence statistics for the College for 2010/2011. It was noted that sickness absence statistics showed an improvement for 2010/2011 compared with 2009/2010. For 2010/2011 the average percentage days lost per employee at NRC was 3.21% and 8.37 average days lost compared with the sector average of 3.48% and 9.10 days.

It was also noted that the three most common reasons for long-term absences in 2010/2011 were: stress, hospitalisation and limb injury. Long-term absences made a major contribution to the overall cost of sickness absence during 2010/2011, when the direct staffing cost to the College amounted to £626,800.

The Head of Human Resources explained that the College had significantly reduced its sickness absence figures during 2010/2011 and said that improved targets had been set for 2011/2012 at 7.7 days lost per employee or 3% working days lost as a % of days available.

38.12 Progress Report on Corporate Targets 2011/2012

The Governing Body received a Progress Report on Corporate Targets 2011/2012 and noted that satisfactory progress has been made against four of the five targets as detailed in the CDP: quality of student learning experience; staffing structure; estates strategy; and financial stability. It was also noted that fair progress had been made in regard to the development of the curriculum and associated provision prioritised in relation to the social and economic need, government policy and resource allocation.

38.13 College Development Plan 2012/2015

The Director gave a presentation on the College Development Plan 2012/2015, in which he referred to:

a) Sequence of Events. The Director detailed the sequence of events from the Governing Body's Strategic Workshop (29 February 2012), when the domains for the balanced scorecard were discussed to the meeting of the Governing Body (13 June 2012) when the CDP and Budget would be approved and KPI targets confirmed for 2012/2013.

b) KPIs. The Director provided a suggested long-list of 44 KPIs from which a short-list of 12 KPIs had been selected for alignment with domains in the Balanced Scorecard. He informed the Governing Body that the agreed short list would be incorporated in the balanced scorecard and monitored at each meeting of the Governing Body. The remaining KPIs would be monitored by the appropriate sub-committees and would be fed into the corporate KPIs. It was noted that any variance would have to be explained and action plans agreed if necessary.

During discussion comments were made in respect of the fact that six of the twelve KPIs and Targets related to Student Experience and that two involved surveys. The necessity to include retention, achievement and success was queried. It was asserted that these provided a formal feedback mechanism for the Governing Body. A suggestion was made that consideration should be given to the removal of retention and achievement and the retention of success. The Director indicated that the KPIs and targets would not be static but would be reviewed from year to year.

The Governing Body gave provisional approval for the KPIs and Targets 2012/2013.

c) College Strategic Aims 2012-2015. The Director referred to the paper on Strategic Aims, which had been circulated to Governors. He stated that, at the request of the Governing Body (14 March 2012), the College's Strategic Aims had been aligned more closely with the balanced scorecard domains.

The Governing Body gave consideration to and approved the revised College Strategic Aims.

d) College Balanced Scorecard. The Director indicated that the final version of the Balanced Scorecard would be incorporated in the draft CDP presented to the next Governing Body meeting in June.

The Governing Body considered and approved the revised balanced scorecard.

38.14 Any Other Notified Business

38.14.1 Replacement for Mr P McCudden. The Chairman referred Governors to the draft advertisement he had received from DEL for a replacement for Mr P McCudden. He said that the Chairs' Committee had given consideration to the advertisement and had expressed the view that too much emphasis has been given to remuneration, commitment and equality of opportunity rather than to the more positive aspects of the appointment. He added that he had relayed his discontent to the Department and had emphasised the need to recruit a Governor with construction/IT expertise. He was assured that this would be made clear in the Information Pack provided for all applicants. The Chairman stressed the need to recruit suitable Governors given the demands placed on Governing Bodies.

There was no further business to transact.

38.15 Date of the Next Meeting

The Chairman reminded Governors that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 5.30 pm **Wednesday 13 June 2012** at the Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus.