

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 1 October 2008 at the Antrim Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mr P McCudden (Acting Vice-Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director)
Mrs A M Campbell, Rev T Jamieson, Mrs U O'Kane,
Ms C O'Neill, Ms A Rankin, Mrs L Wallis

In Attendance Ms H Gault (for minute 10.11), Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston,
Dr C A O'Mullan, Mr J A Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

PRESENTATION

Quality Improvement Plan

Mrs S Kennedy, Head of Quality Improvement, gave a presentation regarding the College's Quality Improvement Unit.

Mrs Kennedy provided an overview of the structure of the Unit and explained the overarching principles, from which its aims have been derived. She stated that in the past it was only curriculum teams that were involved in the self-evaluation process and the production of development plans. She advised Members that all curriculum and support areas would now be involved in the College's new holistic self-evaluation process. The process would be linked to the College Development Plan and Quality Improvement Plan.

Referring to the Quality Improvement Plan she drew attention to its ten key quality improvement areas, which are linked to the College's Strategic Objectives and the aims of the Quality Improvement Unit. It was noted that work was still continuing in relation to two key quality improvement areas.

The Director advised the Governing Body that quality was inherent in the complete spectrum of College activities. It was crucial to have a Unit to lead and drive quality improvement college-wide. In response to a comment regarding the ambitious aims of the Unit, it was noted that the Education and Training Inspectorate had advised the College to set its aims high.

The Governing Body **agreed** that the Quality Improvement Plan be approved in principle on the understanding that a final version would be circulated to Members for comment prior to submission to DEL by 31 October 2008.

10.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr L Caul, Mrs K Collins, Mr S Davidsom, Ms J Fullerton, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mrs C Moore and Mr A Watt.

10.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests. The Chairperson stated that there were still two Members, who had not completed their Declaration of Interests pro forma. He

stressed that it was essential for members to complete and return their declarations as soon as possible.

10.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 14 June 2008 were approved.

10.4 Matters Arising

10.4.1 Membership of the Governing Body (minute 9.1)

The Director reminded Members that the Governing Body, at its meeting on 18 June 2008 and on the advice of DEL, had agreed that Mrs Collins' name should be forwarded to DEL for approval as Acting Chair of the Governing Body until a permanent replacement was found for the late Professor Clarke.

On 20 August 2008 the Department had issued all eligible members of the Governing Body with an e-mail/letter asking for expressions of interest in the post of Acting Chairperson; no expressions of interest were received by the deadline, 3 September 2008.

The Department issued another communication on 5 September extending the deadline until 10 September 2008. It is understood that two expressions of interest have been received.

The Director stated that the Department had undertaken a sift of candidates, who had expressed an interest in the post of Acting Chairperson of the Governing Body. He advised that interviews would be held during the forthcoming week.

10.4.2 Staff and Student Awards (minute 9.7 g)

The Director indicated that staff and students, who had gained Skillbuild and Construction Training awards, would meet Members of the Governing Body for a group photograph prior to the next meeting at Ballymena Campus at 5.30 pm on Wednesday 26 November 2008. He said that it was intended to have the session prior to the present meeting but the Board Room at Ballymena was still unfinished.

10.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairperson's communications.

10.6 Director's Report

The Director referred to the following issues:

a) Area Based Planning Seminar Post Primary Education.

The Director reported that he had attended an Area Based Planning seminar at Enniskillen, which had been launched by the Department of Education. The Director advised that NRC would be heavily involved in the scheme as it was represented in all five Planning Groups.

b) Innovation Fund Response. The Director reported that the College had been awarded £8,000 from the DEL Innovation Fund, to which £3 million had been made available. This had come as a disappointment to the College as much time and effort had been expended in submitting a bid for £1/2 million to the Department.

The Governing Body **agreed** that the Director should write to the Department seeking feedback regarding the derisory allocation. If the response does not address the

College's concerns it may be necessary to take the matter to the Assistant Secretary level.

c) Graduation Ceremonies. The Director invited Members to the Graduation Ceremonies to be held at Galgorm Manor on 16 October 2008; the morning ceremony commences at 10 am and the afternoon ceremony at 2.00 pm

10.7 Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report.

10.8 Minutes of the Audit Committee

The Governing Body received three sets of minutes from the Committee. The Governing Body noted the following issues:

18 June 2008

a) Risk Management Policy

The Committee received a copy of the Risk Management Policy and noted it was being circulated to stakeholders for consultation prior to submission for approval to the Governing Body.

2 July 2008

a) Correspondence

The Committee noted that the revised Financial Memorandum recommends that the Audit Committee should have a pre-meeting with the Internal Auditors before meetings of the Audit Committee, with no members of staff present. The Committee has decided to hold at least two meetings each financial year.

b) Internal Audit Review

The Committee received a progress report on the status of all recommendations made in the internal reports of and carried forward from the pre-merged institutions. A Member raised a query as to why some 32% of the recommendations had still to be implemented. The Governing Body noted that the delay was, in the main, due to the restructuring process as many of the new managers had not been in place until recently. The Director stated that the Governing Body would receive reports on a regular basis regarding the implementation status of any outstanding recommendations.

23 September 2008

a) Appointment of External Auditors

The Committee noted that the Department had approved external auditors and a letter would soon be issued to the College, following the cool-off period, providing details of the firm appointed to carry out the College's external audit provision.

b) Corporate Risk Register

The Committee endorsed the revised Corporate Risk Register and forwarded it to the Governing Body for approval. The Governing Body considered the revised Risk Register and **agreed that it be approved.**

c) Annual Internal Audit Report 2007/2008

The Committee received the College's Annual Internal Audit Report summarising the findings of the work performed by the Internal Auditors during the financial year 2007/2008.

d) Three-Year Strategic Internal Audit Plan

The Committee received a copy of the Three-Year Strategic Internal Audit Plan for the period 1 August 2007 to 31 July 2010. The Committee approved the revised Audit Plan for 2008/2009.

10.9 Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 2 September 2008 and 23 September 2008. The Governing Body noted the following topics considered by the Committee:

2 September 2008

a) Voluntary Redundancies

The Committee noted that following approval from the Department action had been taken to process 17 redundancies by the proposed date of termination of employment, 31 August 2008.

b) Financial Strategy 2008/2011 and Budget 2008/2009

The Committee agreed that:

i) The Director should arrange a meeting with the Department to explain the College's Financial Strategy;

ii) Representatives from the Department should be invited to a meeting of the Governing Body to discuss the financial situation;

iii) The Financial Strategy 2008/2011 and the Budget 2008/2009 should be recommended to the Governing Body for approval. The Governing Body noted that these matters appear as a separate agenda item at minute 10.11 below.

23 September 2008

a) Concessionary Fees

The Committee noted that one College was not following the six-college agreement in relation to the cessation of concessionary fees. The Director advised that this matter would be raised at a forthcoming ANIC meeting. In the meantime letters have been received requesting the reinstatement of concessionary fees and the Director is meeting a MLA to discuss the issue.

b) Skills Centre, Newtownabbey

The Committee reported that DEL had given approval for the new build Skills Centre at Newtownabbey and had confirmed funding to a maximum of £8,082k.

c) Budget Planning and Monitoring Plan

The Committee received a copy of the Annual Budget and Monitoring Plan, which is an integral part of the overall planning cycle.

d) Financial Returns Timetable

The Committee received a copy of the Financial Returns Timetable detailing the mandatory returns to be submitted, by due dates, to the Department during 2008/2009.

10.10 Minutes of Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 23 September 2008. The Governing Body noted the following topics considered by the Committee:

a) Management Appointments

The Committee reported that that one of the outstanding third-tier appointments, Head of MIS, had been filled. It noted that there were still five outstanding fourth-tier appointments: HR Business Support Officer; Equality Officer; Facilities Manager; Learning Resources Manager; and Health and Safety Co-ordinator.

b) Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for Support Staff

The Committee reported that it was intended to have Procedures in place in early October 2008.

c) Correspondence

The Committee noted DEL Circular FE 14/08 setting out temporary arrangements, which have been put in place to assist colleges to make appointments in advance of receiving an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate.

The Governing Body noted that the College had implemented a risk assessment procedure for appointments pending receipt of a full enhancement check. This procedure is consistent with the temporary arrangements as described in Circular FE 14/08.

d) Continuous Professional Development

The Committee approved and forwarded to the Governing Body a document setting out the College's Continuous Professional Development Policy, Procedures and Entitlement Framework for 2008/2009.

The Governing Body agreed that the Continuous Professional Development document be approved.

e) Associate Lecturer Status

The Committee noted correspondence relating to Associate Lecturer Status.

10.11 Financial Report

The Governing Body received the following documents:

a) Financial Strategy 2008/2011 and Budget 2008/2009.

Ms Gault explained that the College is projecting a deficit budget of £982k for 2008/2009; income had remained static over the last five years and expenditure had risen by some 10% primarily as a result of increased staff costs. The withdrawal of several earmarked funds had put severe financial pressure on the College's operation; the College must now meet its estate and IT expenditure, in addition to

increased staffing costs, primarily from its own resources. Ms Gault listed the key financial issues facing the College, including increased fuel costs, on-going industrial action and uncertainty over concessionary fees.

The Director pointed out that the budget for 2008/2009 included an exceptional item of expenditure, £400k for redundancy costs. Taking account of this exceptional item operating costs exceeded income for the financial year by £500k. He advised the Governing Body that he had apprised the Department of the College's financial position.

Ms Gault indicated that the College's Financial Strategy for 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 is to control staff costs by allowing up to 2.5% for cost of living increases and to make 3% efficiency savings in staff amounting to approximately £750k each year. This would allow a breakeven position in 2011. A new Planning and Budgetary process has been developed for budget holders to assist the College in meeting its financial targets. Budget holders are required to review their budgets on a monthly basis and report variances through their line management structure. The Director advised that hard decisions would have to be taken if the College failed to achieve a break-even position

The Governing Body noted that the Finance & General Purposes Committee had considered and recommended both the Financial Strategy and the Budget to the Governing Body for approval.

The Governing Body agreed that the Financial Strategy and the Budget 2008/2009 be approved.

b) Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2008.

Ms Rankin presented the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2008, during which the College had generated an historical costs deficit of £781k. The result includes £1.7m for restructuring costs, of which £953k was received from the Department. It was noted that the College had accumulated reserves of £3.7m and cash balances amounting to £7.7m at the year-end.

She explained that the Annual Report and Financial Statements were subject to audit and informed the Governing Body that the Finance and General Purposes Committee and the Audit Committee at their meetings on 18 November 2008 would consider the audited version and make a recommendation for approval to the meeting of the Governing Body on 26 November 2008. In the intervening period Ms Rankin requested Members to forward any comments on the document to the Secretary.

The Director commended the Director of Finance, her team and budget holders on achieving College financial targets in difficult circumstances during the financial year 2007/2008.

The Governing Body agreed that the Annual Report and Financial Statements be approved in principle.

10.12 Enrolments

The Deputy Director Curriculum and the Deputy Director Support and Development informed the Governing Body regarding the present position in relation to enrolments. It was noted that:

a) Full-time recruitment has increased slightly from 2,959 in 2007/2008 to 3,005 in 2008/2009. It was noted that the full-scale review of curriculum provision would examine trends and implications for future provision;

b) Part-time enrolments are substantially down on the same period in 2007/2008. The main contributory factors seem to be the level of fees in general but in particular the removal of concessionary fees. Numbers for this year's school link work on the Entitlement Framework are still incomplete but it is predicted that they will be at or just above the 2007/2008 level;

c) The overall enrolment in the three areas of training provision - Training for Success, Apprenticeships NI and Jobskills - shows a small increase, 1,426 compared with 1,405 in 2007/2008. The data for the Apprenticeships NI and Training for Success indicate a reduction of 15% in recruitment and an overall decline in the number of employed status trainees eligible to undertake the Apprenticeship NI programmes and a subsequent shift to the Training for Success programmes.

In response to a query regarding fee setting the Governing Body was advised that the College used a costing model to determine fees. A Member made a further request for retention figures stating that it was important, from a quality standpoint, for the College to have high retention rates.

10.13 Development of NRC Planning Process

The Director summarised the various aspects of the planning process, which have been developed by the College: mission statement, core values, strategic challenges and progress in relation to the CDP.

He apprised Members of the progress made by the College in 2007/2008 towards achieving its strategic objectives. He also drew attention to the targets set for 2008/2009.

The Director advised Members that it was now proposed to bring the various strands of the planning process together to form a new coherent and inclusive planning model for the College. He highlighted the role of the Governing Body in the review and setting of Strategic Objectives and in the consideration and approval of the College Development Plan for submission to the Department.

The Governing Body agreed that:

a) The new College Planning Model be approved;

b) An afternoon seminar, devoted to the planning process, should be arranged at the Ballymena Campus in early December 2008. Ms Brannigan should be asked to seek guidance from Members as to a convenient date for the seminar. The session would conclude with a light meal.

10.14 Annual Equality Progress Report

The Deputy Director Planning and Resources stated that the College is required to submit an annual progress report to the Equality Commission for Northern Ireland on Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 and Section 49A of the Disability Discrimination Order 2006.

It was noted that a draft report had been forwarded to the Commission to meet a deadline of 30 September 2008 on the understanding that revisions, if any, can be forwarded to the Commission following consideration by the Governing Body.

It was noted that an Equality Officer had now been appointed, who would be responsible for further embedding and mainstreaming equality issues.

A Member congratulated the Director of Finance and the team responsible for collating the comprehensive report. She also drew attention to the overall quality of

papers being submitted to the Governing Body and asked for the appropriate staff to be commended.

The Governing Body agreed that the Annual Equality Progress Report be approved.

10.15 Any Other Business

There was no notified business.

10.16 Next Meeting

The Governing Body noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for **Wednesday 26 November 2008 at 5.30 pm** at the Ballymena Campus.

Kay Collins

J A Hunter