

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 16 December 2008 at the Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mr P McCudden (Acting Vice Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Ms J Fullerton, Rev T Jamieson, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Ms C O'Neill, Mrs A Rankin, Mr A Watt

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Acting Chair of Governing Body

The Governing Body noted that the Department for Employment and Learning had appointed Mrs K Collins as Acting Chair of the Governing Body until a permanent Chair is appointed. The Governing Body congratulated Mrs Collins on her appointment.

Mr McCudden, the Acting Vice Chairperson, took the Chair in the absence of Mrs Collins

Presentation

Mr D Young and Mr A Cole from the Department gave a presentation concerning the CDP planning process.

The Governing Body was informed that it was the Department's intention to manage the CDP as a single process. The main advantage of this process would be earlier confirmation to colleges of their budgets and the associated benefit of giving colleges more time to plan and publicise their course provision.

During CDP discussions in 2008 colleges expressed the view that the tabular layout used for the completion of Phase 2 of the CDP was too restrictive. As a result it was agreed that, in future, CDPs should complement College Business/Strategic Plans. The Governing Body was advised that, when colleges were producing Business/Strategic Plans, they could either produce a separate CDP document and refer to it in their Business Plan or include the CDP as an Annex to their Business Plan. Irrespective of the approach it would be necessary to include a number of themes to ensure that colleges meet the Department's requirements.

It was pointed out that the section of the CDP, which projects FE and HE enrolments and Funded Learning Units (FLUs) that colleges aim to deliver, sets high-level targets for colleges in a number of curriculum areas. It is for colleges to determine how they meet the individual targets for the provision in the following curriculum areas: at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3; in priority skills areas; on the regulated qualification frameworks; and Essential Skills areas. Mention was made of the tension between the vocational and non-vocational provision

The Governing Body was advised that it was important for colleges to outline, in their CDPs, how they will support employers and the wider economy. It was also important for colleges to outline how they will improve access to learners, in order to encourage the development of occupational skills by those who are unemployed or are socially excluded. It was mentioned that in previous years, the South West College had delivered some provision in day care centres in many areas across Northern Ireland. In future Colleges should attempt to take

responsibility for provision of this type within their own catchment areas as part of their response to meeting community needs.

In conclusion the presenters stressed the importance of effective data management. Curriculum target setting and budget setting processes within the CDP, all rely heavily on timely and accurate data management on the part of college staff.

Members of the Governing Body raised a number of observations during the ensuing discussion. A plea was made for guidance in relation to work-based learning; it was currently difficult to ascertain definitive funding availability. A member queried how the College would obtain credit for the delivery of community education and how it could be accommodated within the restricted provision for non-vocational education. A view was expressed that the current funding model, although a vast improvement on the previous one, does not address the financial situation inherited by the Northern Regional College. The College has little scope for significantly increasing funding through growth alone and the only course of action available to it is to cut expenditure. This is liable to be self-defeating as it could lead to a reduction in income. The Director indicated that he would be seeking further discussions with DEL in relation to this matter. The Chair thanked Mr Young and Mr Cole for their detailed presentation.

12.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mrs AM Campbell, Dr L Caul, Mrs K Collins, Mr S Davidson, Mr A Henderson, Mrs L Wallis and Mrs U O’Kane.

12.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

12.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 1 October 2008 were approved.

12.4 Matters Arising

12.4.1 Innovation Fund (minute 10.6b)

The Director informed the Governing Body that a further £80,000 had been allocated to the College from the DEL Innovation Fund. He advised the meeting that the College was seeking feedback in relation to this year’s bid before submitting a bid for the next financial year.

12.5 Chairperson’s Communications

There were no Chairperson’s communications.

12.6 Director’s Report

The Director referred to the following issues in his Report to the Governing Body:

a) Strategic Review Workshop. The Director advised Members that the Governing Body’s Strategic Workshop would be held on 14 January 2009. The workshop would receive inputs relating to: Quality Improvement and the Role of the Inspectorate from District Inspectors; Corporate Branding from Rodney Millar Associates; views on the Merger Process from a Head of Faculty and the Head of Support Department; and the Review of College Vision and Strategic Objectives from the Director and Head of Quality Improvement.

Following the Governing Body's Review the College will hold a Management Conference in early February 2009 to establish the key strategic issues and parameters for the internal planning process, which will lead to the production of the CDP for 2009-2012.

b) Area-Based Planning. The Director reported that the Minister for Education had launched an area-based planning initiative for the delivery of the curriculum entitlement for 14-19 year olds. FE colleges have been included in the initiative; the Director is a member of the NE Area-Based Planning Group. The Director explained that the Group has an advisory function at present but this could develop into something more important in future.

c) Economic Engagement Report. It was noted that DEL had requested a quarterly report on college economic activity. The Director drew the Governing Body's attention to the first report submitted by the College's recently established Economic Engagement Centre. The income generated through this work in the current financial year will amount to approximately £550,000. The Director drew attention to the KITE Project, which was attached as an annex to the Report. The total value of the Project was €3.8 million to be shared over a three year period as follows: NRC €1.47 million, IT Sligo €1.43 million and Ayr College €1.01 million.

d) New Build at Newtownabbey. The Director informed members that the College is approaching the final stages of the pre-contract phase of the project. Work on the site is now expected to begin in early March 2009.

The first meeting of the Estates Project Board, which will oversee the development and implementation of the College's estates strategy, was held on 7 November 2008. The Governing Body was represented by Mr P McCudden. The Governing Body confirmed the appointment of Mr McCudden as its representative on the Project Board.

d) Inspectorate Reports. The Governing Body noted a copy of a recent Education and Training Inspectorate survey of the provision for students with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in Colleges of Further and Higher Education in Northern Ireland.

e) Improving Quality: Raising Standards Reports. The Governing Body noted that the College had been asked to revise two Improving Quality: Raising Standards Reports by the Education and Training Inspectorate and resubmit them by the end of November 2008. Both reports relate to the provision of Jobskills at the College's predecessor institutions: the East Antrim Institute and the Causeway Institute.

f) Self-Evaluation Review. The Director drew the Governing Body's attention to College's Self Evaluation Review for Level 2 Priority Skills to meet the CDP process 2008/2009 to 2010/2011. It was noted that the document had been forwarded to the Inspectorate, who would be conducting an inspection of this curriculum area at the NRC after Easter. There would be an opportunity for the Inspectorate to advise the College in regard to this visit at the Planning Session scheduled for 14 January 2009.

g) Tour of Campuses. The Director informed the Governing Body that he and members of the Senior Management Team had been visiting the various campuses over the past week to meet members of staff. He stated that they would be visiting the Magherafelt Campus on 17 December 2008 to celebrate 100 years of Further Education in Magherafelt. The Governing Body congratulated the Director and the Senior Management Team on their initiative, which provided a positive statement regarding organisational culture.

h) Ballymena Business Award. The Director reported that the College had received an award for Business Training and Development. The Governing Body congratulated everyone concerned with this prestigious award.

12.7 Correspondence

12.7.1 DEL Circular FE 17/08 dated 3 December 2008

The Governing Body received a copy of DEL Circular FE dated 3 December 2008 providing guidance to further education colleges on the format of their College Development Plans from 2009/2010 to 2011/2012.

The Governing Body agreed that the Finance and General Purposes Committee be empowered to approve the CDP for submission to the Department at its meeting on 24 February 2009.

12.8 Minutes of the Finance and General Purposes Committee

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

a) External Audit Service. The Committee reported that KPMG had been sub-contracted by the Audit Office to carry out fieldwork on the audit of the financial statements.

b) Tender for Legal Services. The Governing Body noted that the tender document for the appointment of a legal services provider is in the process of being finalised making use of a new format for procurement. It is hoped to advertise for a provider early in the New Year.

c) New Skills Centre, Newtownabbey. It was noted that discussions are currently being conducted with the contractors in preparation for the new build at Newtownabbey. The Committee has agreed to permit students to watch the construction process, which is scheduled to commence in March 2009.

d) Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Committee considered the Annual Report and Financial Statements for the Year ended 31 July 2008 and noted that the External Auditors had completed their audit but an opinion had still to be received. It was noted that the Annual Report and Financial Statements could not be forwarded to the Governing Body for adoption until the NIAO opinion had been received. The Annual Report and Financial Statements would be presented in the first instance to a meeting of the Audit Committee, scheduled for 6 January 2009, which would consider and make recommendations to the Governing Body for their adoption.

e) Financial Returns Timetable. The Committee received Guidance Notes from DEL detailing dates for Mandatory Returns to the Department. The Committee also received: the NRC Timetable for 2007/2008 indicating how the College had met its targets in 2007/2008, with the exception of the delay in submitting the annual financial statements as a result of the audit process; and the NRC Timetable 2008/2009 providing the College's plans for the current year.

f) Monthly Management Accounts. The Committee received the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 30 September 2008. More up-to-date Accounts, for the period up to 31 October 2008, have been provided for the Governing Body (see minute 12.10).

12.9 Minutes of Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meetings of the Staffing Committee held on 21 October 2008 and 11 November 2008. The Governing Body noted:

a) Meeting on 21 October 2008

It was noted that many of the issues discussed at this meeting had been further developed at the meeting on 11 November 2008. The following topic was brought to the attention of the Governing Body:

1) Voluntary Redundancy. The Committee considered a paper relating to voluntary redundancy for support staff. The Committee agreed that: a letter should be forwarded to all members of support staff seeking expressions of interest in voluntary redundancy without any commitment from the College; and exemplars of potential costs of redundancy should be prepared for the next meeting. (This was discussed under reserved business at the meeting on 11 November 2008). The Committee also agreed that the Regional Secretary NIPSA should be provided with a progress report.

b) Meeting on 11 November 2008

The Committee considered the following topics:

1) Management Appointments. The Committee were informed that offers had now been made in respect of the following appointments subject to the results of the vetting process: HR Business Support Officer, Equality Officer, Learning Resources Manager and Health and Safety Co-ordinator. The Facilities Manager post is being held for possible redeployment.

2) Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for Support Staff. It was noted that a date is being arranged to resolve outstanding issues in relation to Grievance and Discipline Procedures.

3) Industrial Relations. The Committee noted that a new round of negotiations is about to commence with a view to resolving the long-term pay dispute.

4) Correspondence. The Committee received a copy of DEL Circular dated 7 November 2008, updating and revising guidance provided in Circular No FE 14/08, enabling Colleges to continue to make appointments and place students in childcare positions in advance of receiving an Enhanced Disclosure Certificate.

The Governing Body noted that Circular FE 14/08 had stated that, under the emergency arrangements, AccessNI would carry out an initial Assessment of vetting applications by checking them against the three Northern Ireland disqualification lists. It was noted that the Initial Assessment had now been extended to include checks against barred lists throughout the United Kingdom.

12.10 Monthly Management Accounts

The Governing Body noted the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 October 2008, which show an historical cost deficit of £13k and a healthy bank balance of £6.9 million. The Director of Finance explained that the historical cost deficit was £543k below the budget figure due, in the main, to FE Higher Education fees and Student Company loans being £532k behind budget, and the examinations budget being more than £300k more than budget as a result of a timing issue. Staffing costs were also £100k below budget.

12.11 Student Enrolments

The Deputy Director Curriculum informed the Governing Body of the current position regarding enrolment trends. It was noted that:

a) Full-Time Further Education enrolments had increased from 2,959 in 2007/2008 to 3,070 in 2008/2009.

b) Further Education Part-Time enrolments had decreased by 35% during the same period. The main contributory factor seems to have been the removal of concessionary fees. In response to a query the Director advised the Governing Body that this matter would be considered at a forthcoming ANIC meeting. Much interest would be focussed on enrolment figures at the College, which permitted concessionary fees.

c) Higher Education enrolments had remained static. It was noted that the College has an allocation of 249 full-time students and to-date there have been only 198 enrolments. There have been 791 part-time HE enrolments compared to the CDP prediction of 850.

The Deputy Director Support and Development provide an update regarding ApprenticeshipsNI, Training for Success and Jobskills. She stated that enrolments had declined in each of the Curriculum Schools for the months of September, October and November. The decline in overall numbers reflects a combination of a number of factors including the loss of employed status within ApprenticeshipsNI as a result of the economic downturn. The Deputy Director explained that DEL had recently issued formal arrangements to assist apprentices. Colleges are now required to implement systems to evidence a proactive approach to attempting to source alternative or foster employment for the trainee. She also advised that it was possible for apprentices under the ApprenticeshipNI cohort to transfer to a Pre-Apprenticeship Scheme if they are under 18. Apprentices over 18 can progress to the Steps to Work programme if alternative or foster employment is not found.

The Deputy Director drew Members' attention to a table providing statistics in respect of apprentices, who have lost employment since September 2008. It was noted that 47 had fallen into this category primarily in Plumbing and Joinery. Forty-two of these trainees had found places through contingency arrangements.

The Governing Body thanked staff for the flexibility they had demonstrated in endeavouring to ensure that trainees leave with qualifications. It also requested the Director to write to the Department regarding the plight of trainees and stressing the need to protect the skills base for the future development of the construction industry.

12.12 Any Other Notified Business

12.13 Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 14 January 2009 at the Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus. This meeting, which will take the form of a planning session, will commence at 1.00 pm and be followed by a formal meeting of the Governing Body. Dinner will be served at the conclusion of the session at approximately 6.30 pm.