

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 4 March 2009 at the Newtownabbey Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mrs K Collins (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mrs A M Campbell
Ms J Fullerton, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden,
Mrs U O'Kane, Mrs A Rankin, Mrs L Wallis, Mr A Watt.

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Governance Healthcheck

The Chairperson welcomed Mr T Carson, Director, and Ms M Thompson, Assistant Director Learning Skills Development Agency Northern Ireland to conduct the Governance Healthcheck. Mr Carson outlined the range of services provided by LSDA NI including the Support for Governors service. Ms Thompson explained that the Governance Healthcheck is a self-assessment survey to assess and benchmark the development needs, efficiency and effectiveness of governing bodies of Further Education colleges. She advised Governors that the Healthcheck questionnaire comprised ten sections with each section sub-divided to capture: individual governors' perceptions of board performance; self-assessment of the contribution of individual governors; and individual governors' assessment of the quality of information provided to the board. Ms Thompson informed Members that LSDA NI would prepare a report on the findings, which would be discussed with Board Members.

She added that, when the Governance Healthcheck had been completed with each participating board, LSDA NI would prepare a further report on the overall sector findings, which would be issued to each governing body; this was intended to support benchmarking activity across the sector.

The Governing Body agreed that the self-assessment questionnaires should be completed by each Member and submitted to the Secretary by 13 March 2009.

The Director thanked Mr Carson and Ms Thompson and he expressed his gratitude to LSDA NI for its outstanding support to the College. He mentioned, in particular, the Lecturers into Industry scheme and the Quality Improvement programmes.

14.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Dr L Caul, Mrs B Crotty, Mr S Davidson, Mr A Henderson, Rev T Jamison and Ms C O'Neill.

14.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests. It was noted that one member of the Governing Body had still to complete a declaration pro forma.

14.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 14 January 2009 were approved.

14.4 Matters Arising

14.4.1 Consultancy to Identify Financial Options for the College (minute 13.6 b))

The Governing Body noted that Grant Thornton, who had previously carried out the College Due Diligence Report, had been appointed as consultants to identify financial options for the College. The first meeting with the consultants was scheduled for 5 March 2009.

14.5 Chairperson's Communications

There were no Chairperson's communications.

14.6 Director's Report

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

a) Planning. The College held a Management Conference on 6 February 2009, which was attended by 75 staff. The participants reviewed the College's progress and considered the new set of strategic objectives and how they could be implemented throughout the College. The final version of the College's Corporate Plan will be brought to the June meeting of the Governing Body for approval and a second management conference, later in June, will address the implementation of the following year's corporate targets.

b) Accountability Meeting. In a new development in the accountability relationship between Colleges and the Department for Employment and Learning, there will now be an annual meeting between the Directors/Accounting Officers and the Permanent Secretary. The Director advised the Governing Body that he had had a meeting with the Permanent Secretary just prior to the meeting of the Governing Body; he had been accompanied at the meeting by the Chair of the Audit Committee (representing the Acting Chairperson of the Governing Body) and the Director of Finance.

The Director said that the meeting had been positive and he had had the opportunity to apprise the Minister of the College's financial difficulties. He had informed the Minister that Grant Thornton had been appointed to conduct a review of the financial options for the College and, on receipt of the consultants' report, the College would be seeking a meeting with Department representatives to discuss the situation.

The Director informed the Governing Body that the Permanent Secretary had made reference to the Northern Ireland Audit Office Report in respect of Fermanagh College. The Report would also make reference to difficulties experienced in recent years by other colleges, including the Northern Regional College.

c) Workforce Development Forum. The Northern Workforce Development Forum held an information event at Farm Lodge Campus on 11 February 2009. Over 100 people, including the Minister, Sir Reg Empey and Mr Bill McGinnis, the Northern Ireland Advisor for Employment and Skills, attended the event. The morning was a great success and received positive comments from the Minister and DEL officials.

d) Area Inspection of Ballymena. NRC has been involved in an area inspection of education provision in Ballymena. The Inspection Team was examining the complete range of provision in the area from pre-school to FE and the Youth Service. During the exercise, inspectors met with representatives of the Governing Body, namely Ms Wallis and Mr McCudden. The inspectors found strengths in the College's strategic vision and leadership, economic links, school links, and interaction with other agencies involved with student support.

e) Association of Northern Ireland Colleges. College Directors have now been re-instated as members of the ANIC Board. Since the merger the Board has consisted of Chairs only. The new situation should help to progress regional sector issues and provide a more inclusive and coherent sector representation and leadership.

f) Student Success. Chevelle Jamison, a part-time student on the NVQ3 Classroom Assistants Course at the Ballymoney Campus, is one of the Northern Ireland winners of the prestigious City and Guilds Gold Medals.

g) Fair Trade Fashion Show. Art and Design students from the College took part in a Fair Trade Fashion Show at the Hilton Hotel, Templepatrick giving them the opportunity to display a wide range of fashion items.

h) Estates Strategy Board. A meeting of the Estates Strategy Board, which includes Mr McCudden as a member, is scheduled for 5 March 2009. The College Estate Strategy, which includes the new build at the Ballymena and Coleraine Campuses, will be considered

14.7 Correspondence

The Governing Body noted the following correspondence:

a) Communication from DEL indicating that the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister plans to carry out a Public Appointments Disability Survey before the end of the current financial year.

b) Correspondence from LSDA inviting Governors to attend a seminar, 'Quality Assurance and the Role of the Governor', at Londonderry, Belfast or Portadown on 24, 25 and 26 March 2009 from 6-8.30 pm. It was noted that the venue for the Belfast seminar is Malone House on 25 March 2009 at 6.00 pm. **Governors interested in attending one of the sessions were advised to return their application forms to the Secretary by 13 March 2009.**

c) Correspondence from the Department of Finance and Personnel drawing attention to guidance on best practice in relation to Joined Up Projects.

14.8 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 24 February 2009. The Governing Body noted the following topics considered by the Committee:

a) Chairperson Finance and General Purposes Committee. The Committee appointed Mrs K Collins as its Chairperson.

b) Sale of Leases of Land at Larne. The Committee agreed that the College should proceed with the sale of the Lease of a small portion of the Larne site for £30,000 to Larne YMCA for the purpose of building a family centre. The Committee also agreed that the College should proceed with the sale of the lease of the Playing Fields at Larne to Larne Grammar School, subject to confirmation from the Department that it is agreeable to the sale on the basis that the ground will be used only for sports and recreational purposes.

d) Concessionary Fees. The Committee noted that the Finance Officers of the six colleges are currently giving consideration to a sector agreement in regard to concessionary fees. Their findings would be reported to the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

e) New Skills Centre Newtownabbey. The Committee noted that the contractors are expected to commence work on the new build at Newtownabbey during the first week in April. In accordance with the NEC Type C contract the contractors are currently preparing a price for the build and will submit it to the College in early March 2009. The Deputy Director stated that it would be crucial for the contractor's price to be within the College's remit.

It was noted that additional funding was required for the installation a biomass boiler; an application for funding had been submitted to the Department of Finance and Personnel Energy Efficiency Fund.

f) Monthly Management Accounts. The Committee noted that the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2008 indicate that the College has a deficit of £100k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £460k, which is £267k behind budget. The Committee noted the healthy Bank Balance, which amounted to £5.8m at 31 December 2008.

g) College Development Plan. The Committee agreed that the amended CDP and the suggested FLU targets be approved and forwarded to the Department to meet the 27 February deadline. The Governing Body at its meeting on 16 December 2008 empowered the Committee to consider and approve the CDP for submission to the Department.

h) Purchasing. The Committee received a document providing details of how the College meets the purchasing requirements of the Financial Memorandum. The document listed each paragraph of the Financial Memorandum relating to purchasing and stated how the College meets the requirements. The Queen's University, Belfast and the University of Ulster have expressed an interest in providing a procurement arrangement with the FE sector. The Director of Finance suggested and the Committee agreed that the College's tender for legal services should be delayed until the procurement situation has been resolved. In the meantime the College would continue to use the current legal services.

i) Performance Review. The Committee noted that the Director and the Director of Finance had conducted the half-yearly performance review with each budget holder and their line manager. It was noted that requests for additional resources outweigh the release of funds by approximately £180k. Due to the current financial position of the College, not all requests for additional funding will be met. As a consequence there should be no increase in the projected deficit of the College for the year ended 31 July 2009.

j) Sustainable Development Policy. The Committee noted that an organisation the size of NRC had an impact upon the environment and that the College was committed to minimising any negative effects within the constraints imposed by financial sustainability. The Committee approved and forwarded to the Governing Body a Sustainability Development Policy, which details the principles underpinning the College's commitment.

The Governing Body approved the College Sustainability Development Policy.

k) Calendar of Meetings. The Committee agreed that the Calendar of Meetings 2009/2010 be approved and forwarded to the Governing Body.

The Governing Body approved the Calendar of meetings for 2009/2010.

14.9 Monthly Management Accounts

The Governing Body noted the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 January 2009. The Accounts indicate that the College has a surplus of £343k on continuing operations (£322k behind budget) and an historic surplus of 1,017k. The Bank balance at 31 January 2009 was £6.6million.

During discussion the Governing Body noted, inter alia, that FE fees were £388k less than budget due to the significant decrease in part-time enrolments; full-time and part-time Higher Education fees were also behind budget by £83k, as a result of failure to reach target enrolments.

14.10 College Development Plan

The Governing Body received a copy of and endorsed the College Development Plan, which had been approved for submission to the Department by the Finance and General Purposes Committee (24 February 2009) acting under delegated powers.

The Governing Body thanked all members of staff, who had been involved in its preparation.

The Governing Body received a presentation from the Deputy Director Curriculum concerning the College's Funded Learning Unit (FLU) bid, which was forwarded to the Department to meet a 27 February 2009 deadline. The Deputy Director reviewed the College's performance against the FLU targets for 2008/2009. He explained that the College had a strong performance in full-time recruitment in FE, particularly at levels 2 and 3. Part-time recruitment was down in line with the FE sector as a whole. While the College's strategy is to reduce the level of part-time activity at level 1 and below there was still scope for extra recruitment at this level. He stated that the College had the potential to increase its FLU targets for 2009/2010 and the new targets were as follows: FE 5,500 FLUs; HE 638 FLUs; and ES 404 FLUs.

The Governing Body endorsed the FLU bid, which had been approved for submission to DEL, by the Finance and General Purposes Committee (24 February 2009) acting under delegated powers.

14.11 Minutes of Staffing Committee

The Governing Body noted the following issues considered by the Committee:

a) Whistleblowing Policy. The Committee has recommended the Policy to the Governing Body. It was noted that the Policy would only be an interim measure, as it will be replaced, in due course, by a sector-wide policy.

The Governing Body approved the College Whistleblowing Policy.

b) Management Appointment. An offer has now been made in respect of the IT Operations Manager post and interviews for the outstanding fourth-tier Facilities Manager post had been held on 4 March 2009.

c) Grievance and Disciplinary Procedures for Support Staff. The Committee reported that outstanding issues have now been resolved and the Procedures have been implemented.

d) Vetting Process. The Committee noted changes involving the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA), which will become effective from 13 March 2009, as part of the planned implementation of the new Vetting and Barring Scheme (VBS) for Northern Ireland.

14.12 Any Other Notified Business

14.12.1 Education and Training Inspectorate Reports

The Director drew the Governing Body's attention to the following Education and Training Inspectorate Reports, which had been discussed by the Inspectorate at the Strategic Review Workshop in January 2009:

a) Report on the Evaluation of the Strategic and Operational Planning for the Use of Information and Learning Technology. The Inspectorate has evaluated the quality of the planning for and use of ILT in the NRC as good with important strengths in most of its educational provision.

b) Report on the Inspection of the Effectiveness of Self-Evaluation Arrangements for Priority Areas (PSA) at Level 2, and the whole College Quality Improvement. The Inspectorate has indicated that the arrangements for self-evaluation for the PSA programmes at level 2 are good and for the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan very good. The Inspectorate has concluded that the College has demonstrated its capacity for sustained self-improvement.

14.13 Next Meeting

It was noted that a number of meetings would have to be rescheduled. Governors were asked to note the revised dates of meetings:

24 March 2009	Staffing Committee, Ballymena	5.30 pm
31 March 2009	F&GPC, Ballymena	6.00 pm
28 April 2009	Audit Committee, Ballymena	5.00 pm
28 April 2009	Governing Body, Ballymena	6.30 pm

K Collins, Acting Chair

J A Hunter, Secretary