

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 10 June 2009 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mrs K Collins (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Ms A M Campbell
Mr A Henderson, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden,
Mrs A Rankin Mrs L Wallis and Ms C O'Neill

In Attendance Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Dr C O'Mullan,
Mr J A Hunter and Mrs S Kennedy (for Governance Healthcheck).

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Governance Healthcheck

The Governing Body, at its meeting on 28 April 2009, received a Report compiled by LSDA NI and based on the overall responses to the questionnaires completed by Governors. The Governing Body agreed that a workshop should be arranged to discuss the NRC Healthcheck findings prior to the next meeting, when the Sector Report would be available to support benchmarking activity.

The Governing Body welcomed Ms Marie Thompson, Assistant Director Learning Skills Development Agency to act as a facilitator for the workshop.

Ms Thompson stated that the return rate of completed questionnaires for the College had been higher than average providing a good representation of perceived performance and a good baseline from which comparisons can be made in future years. She added that the positive responses in regard to the roles and responsibilities of governors are indicative of an effective committee satisfied with its competencies. Responses also indicate that the Governing Body operates in a professional and efficient manner. Referring to the sections on the curriculum and finance she said that the responses are sufficiently positive for the Board to be satisfied with its performance in relation to the discharge of its responsibilities in these very important areas. Ms Thompson drew attention to mixed responses in sections dealing with human resources, estates and quality assurance.

Ms Thompson drew comparisons with the overall report and stated the College compared more than favourably with the sector. The NRC responses in relation to roles and responsibilities, strategy and mission, and quality assurance were above average for the sector.

In conclusion she recommended that the Governing Body should consider taking the following action:

- a) Review the procedures and practice for undertaking self-assessment of the Governing Body and enhance these as appropriate;
- b) Review the range and format of information that should be provided to Governors for the purpose of strategic planning and monitor performance against targets; and
- c) Review the range of information provided to Governors to monitor performance and assess the effectiveness of the quality assurance process.

During discussion the Director suggested that the Governing Body should undertake self-assessment in the same manner as employed by course evaluation teams. He also expressed the view that the Governing Body was attempting to do too much at its meetings. The Governing Body, for example, gives consideration to all curriculum matters; the establishment of an Educational Committee would obviate the need for detailed discussion of these topics. The formation of such a committee was dependent on the strengthening of the membership of the Governing Body, which would be discussed later in the agenda. He added that there was a duplication of business between the Governing Body and its sub-committees; topics, which were discussed at length by committees, were discussed again by the Governing Body. It would be necessary for the Governing Body to give consideration to the conduct of business.

16.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr S Davidson, Ms J Fullerton, Rev T Jamieson, Mrs U O’Kane and Mr A Watt.

16.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

16.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 28 April 2009 were approved.

16.4 Matters Arising

16.4.1 Meeting with the Department for Employment and Learning

The Director reminded Members that Grant Thornton Consultants had given a presentation on the financial options available to the Northern Regional College at the last meeting of the Governing Body on 28 April 2009. The Governing Body agreed that the Director should seek an immediate meeting with DEL to consider the College’s financial position and to discuss the production of a 5-Year Plan. It also agreed that the College delegation to meet with DEL representatives would comprise Mr Neilands, Mrs Collins, Mrs Moore and Ms Rankin.

The Director informed Governors that a meeting was held on 19 May 2009, at which the Grant Thornton formal report formed the basis of discussion. Their presentation included a recommendation that Grant Thornton should now commence a more detailed Phase II Report, which would produce a 5-Year Plan to enable the College to address its budgetary deficits.

DEL expressed satisfaction that NRC was volunteering a plan of action to overcome its financial difficulties but indicated that it would prefer the College, rather than moving to a Phase II Grant Thornton Review, to undertake a more wide-ranging review, which would involve a detailed analysis of estates, finance, staffing and curriculum. This change would result in a delay in the production of the review; the Grant Thornton Phase II Report would have taken about 8 weeks to complete whereas the more detailed review is unlikely to be completed before the end of 2009.

The Governing Body noted that the Director of Finance had already drafted the terms of reference for this review, which had been submitted to the Department for approval. Once the terms of reference are agreed, there will be a need to tender for consultants.

Correspondence has been received from DEL, dated 2 June 2009, stating that it is fully supportive of the College’s proposal to conduct a detailed strategic and business planning exercise and indicating that it would be happy to provide advice and guidance to the College in the commissioning and conduct of the review, including the provision of a financial contribution towards the cost.

The Director suggested and the Governing Body agreed that a Project Board should be established to oversee the review and should comprise of representatives from Senior Management and staff and the following members of the Governing Body: Mrs Collins, Mr McCudden, Ms Rankin and Mrs Wallis.

The Governing Body noted that it was intended to have three meetings of the Project Board; one in late August at the start of the Review, one in mid-stream and one at the conclusion.

The Director discussed the relationship between this Review and the Economic Appraisal of the Estate Strategy, which was about to commence; an Estates Project Board was being established to oversee the appraisal. He said that estates had an important impact on the College's financial situation and suggested that both exercises could run in parallel. He added that clarification was being sought in regard to this matter and the Governing Body would be informed of the outcome.

16.4.2 New Skills Centre, Newtownabbey

The Deputy Director Planning & Development informed the Governing Body that all the outstanding issues had been clarified to the satisfaction of DEL, DFP and the Contractors. DEL, however, requires confirmation that the fixtures and fittings are within budget, before a construction notice can be issued. The Minister, Sir Reg Empey, has indicated that he will perform the official launch of the new Skills Centre on the morning of 24 June 2009.

16.5 Chairperson's Communications

16.5.1 Membership of Governing Body

The Chairperson advised the Governing Body that:

- a) Mr Sam Davidson, who had offered his resignation with effect from the end of the academic year on 31 July 2009, has now decided to continue as a Member of the Governing Body; a request to DEL to take steps to find a replacement has been cancelled; and
- b) Dr Leslie Caul had resigned with immediate effect on 20 May 2009. The Department has been informed and requested to fill the vacancy.

15.6 Director's Report

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

- a) Apprentice of the Year Competition. At the Apprentice of the Year Competition the Northern Regional College and Schrader Electronics Ltd won a Partnership Award for their commitment to excellence and ensuring that apprentices receive the very best experience in training and work;
- b) Institute of Accountancy Technicians in Ireland. In the Institute of Accountancy Technicians examination students from the College received first and second places;
- c) Connected Thinking. In the University of Ulster Connected Thinking Dragons' Den event students from the NRC took the first three places. Ms Rankin, one of the adjudicators, commented on the high standard of presentations from the NRC candidates. She said that they were a credit to their College and tutors.

16.7 Correspondence

There was no correspondence to report

16.8 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 6 May 2009. The Governing Body noted the following topics considered by the Committee:

a) Sale of Lands at Larne. The agreement regarding the sale of a small portion of land at Larne to Larne YMCA was being forwarded to the YMCA for signature. The Director of Planning and Resources informed the Governing Body that the Lease for the sale of Playing Fields at Larne to Larne Grammar School has now been signed and forwarded to the NRC solicitors to enable them to invoice the School for £97,200.

b) Correspondence. Correspondence has been received from the Department of Finance and Personnel outlining the latest position with regard to the application of public procurement policy within the FE Sector. It has now been agreed that there is no requirement for FE Colleges to procure goods and services, with the exception of construction and advisory services, through a Centre of Procurement Excellence (CoPE).

c) Monthly Management Accounts. The Committee received Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 March and the period up to 30 April 2009. The April Accounts show a deficit of £342k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £669k, which is £171k ahead of budget.

d) Budget. The Committee received a progress report regarding budget projections for 2009/2010, which indicated a deficit of £1.5 million. The Committee noted that the Director of Finance was working to reduce the deficit and would bring forward a revised budget to the meeting of the Governing Body on 10 June 2009. (See minute 16.10 b) below).

16.9 Minutes of the Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 19 May 2009. The Governing Body noted the following topics considered by the Committee:

a) Correspondence. The Committee noted correspondence from the Department for Employment and Learning on the handling of an outbreak of Swine Flu. Advice in relation to swine flu has been posted on the first page of the College intranet site;

b) Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults. The Committee approved an amended Protection of Children and Vulnerable Adults Policy at the request of the Governing Body;

c) Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return. The Committee noted that the Annual Fair Employment Monitoring Return had been submitted to the Equality Commission for the monitoring date of 1 January 2009. The Return provides details of the composition of the workforce in terms of staff groups, and gender and community background;

d) Pay Dispute. The Committee noted that there had been good progress in relation to the pay dispute. An agreement has been negotiated under the auspices of the Labour Relations Agency, which provides for a three-year pay deal and a new lecturers' contract based on annualised hour.

The Director advised the Governing Body that the agreement had now to be approved by the UCU Regional FE Committee on 11 June 2009 and ratified by the Lecturers' Negotiating Committee later in the month. Nevertheless the implementation of the new contract had commenced and was nearing completion. The College was looking forward to industrial peace.

e) Deposit Accounts. The Committee authorised the opening of deposit accounts with the Ulster Bank and the Northern Bank in accordance with the Treasury Management Plan. The Committee also authorised a number of signatories for all College Accounts.

16.10 Corporate Plan and Budget 2009/2010

a) Corporate Plan 2009/2010

The Director informed the Governing Body that the College Development Plan for 2009/2012 had been submitted to the Department. The CDP involves the specific FLU targets on which the financial allocation from DEL is based. He advised the Meeting that the College's budget projections for the three years are now the only outstanding part of the CDP to be finalised and sent to DEL. As reported at minute 16.4.1 above the College will be embarking on a comprehensive review of its business leading to the production of a 5-Year Plan by around the end of 2009.

The Director drew the Governing Body's attention to the Corporate Plan for 2009/2010, which brings together the College's vision and core values, and the 2009/2010 strategic objectives and the corporate targets, amended following the Governing Body's Strategic review in February 2009.

During discussion a Member suggested that one of the targets relating to the Estates Strategy required adjustment. Mention was also made as to whether the document should refer to Vision or Mission Statement. It was agreed that this matter should be addressed at next year's Strategic Review.

The Governing Body approved the Corporate Plan for 2009/2010 subject to an amendment to one of the targets relating to the estates strategy.

b) Financial Budget 2009/2010

The Director of Finance explained that the forecast Income and Expenditure Accounts indicate historic deficits in each of the three years during the period 2009/2010 to 2011/2012: £747k in 2009/2010, £299k in 2010/2011 and £84k in 2011/2012.

The Director informed Members that the Director of Finance had been working over the past week in an endeavour to reduce the budget deficit from some £1.5 million to £747k. This had been achieved by a reduction in staffing budget based on anticipated savings from the implementation of the new contract and by reduced expenditure on maintenance and IT equipment. The reduced deficit would mean that the College would start its 5-Year Plan in a better position with stronger reserves.

The Governing Body noted the consequences of the decisions taken to curtail the 2009/2010 budget deficit. These include: limited funding for redundancy costs restricting the ability to restructure; reductions in IT equipment budget; 15-20% reduction in marketing budget; reduced staff training budget; and minimal funding available for maintenance of ageing buildings.

Members expressed concern that the reduction in the marketing budget would have implications in regard to publicity and exposure of brand. A member also expressed unease that the budget anticipated maximum recruitment despite the downturn in the economy.

The Governing Body debated whether the constraints imposed by the budget were too severe. After discussion **it was agreed that the Budget for 2009/2010 be approved for submission to the Department**

16.11 Quality Reports

The Governing Body noted the following Quality Reports:

a) ETI Focussed Inspection – Priority Skills Areas Level 2. The initial report of the Inspection (11-15 May 2009) provides a summary of the strengths and areas for improvement in relation to Priority Skills Areas Level 2. The report expresses satisfaction with the quality of provision, teaching and learning and standard of students. The report refers to the wide

variation in the quality and maintenance of the accommodation and learning resources across the College. A full written report will be issued in due course requiring a response from the Governing Body in the form of an Action Plan, which will then be reviewed in a follow-up visit by ETI in the following year.

b) Development Review of Higher Education in NRC by the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education. The Review visit took place in February 2009. A letter from QAA, dated 18 May 2009, provides an early indication of the main findings, which will be contained in the formal report, soon to be issued. The letter identifies many areas of good practice but states that there are some areas where it would be advisable or desirable for the College to take remedial action.

c) Area-Based Inspection of Ballymena. A statement from ETI indicates strengths and areas for improvement in relation to the area-based inspection of the Northern Regional College in February 2009. The full area report is still to be issued. It was noted that an Area-Based Inspection of Coleraine had taken place in 2007.

d) Improving Quality: Raising Standards Self Evaluation Report on Apprenticeships NI/Training for Success. The Deputy Director Support & Development advised the Governing Body that the College is required to submit an annual report to DEL on IQRS. The Report provides details of the quality of leadership and management, achievements and standards, and quality of provision for learning in respect of Training for Success.

The Deputy Director stated that the College believed its overall performance to be satisfactory but with some areas for improvement; it had, therefore, awarded itself a Grade 4 in the self-assessment exercise.

In response to a query regarding the tracking of trainees, the Governing Body was informed that the TFS Training Manager was conducting a survey of what was happening to College leavers.

The Governing Body agreed that the Report be approved for submission to the Department.

16.12 Any Other Notified Business

16.12.1 College Insurance Brokers

The Director of Finance informed the meeting that Oval James, the College Insurance Brokers, had asked her to enquire of governors as to whether they are aware of any circumstances in their role as governors, which they feel could give rise to a claim and which should be notified to insurers.

The Director of Finance undertook to e-mail all members of the Governing Body concerning this matter.

16.12.2 Student Governor

The Chairperson informed Members that this was the last meeting of the Student Governor. She thanked him for his contribution to the Governing Body and the Finance & General Purposes Committee and wished him well in the future.

16.13 Next Meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 7 October 2009 at the Ballymena Campus at 5.30 pm.

