

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **GOVERNING BODY**

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 7 October 2009 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mrs K Collins (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mr S Davidson, Mr P McCudden, Mrs U O'Kane, Mrs A Rankin and Mr A Watt

In Attendance Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Dr C O'Mullan, Mr J A Hunter and Mrs C Taylor, Mr K Nelson and Mr H Saled (for unreserved business).

### **UNRESERVED BUSINESS**

#### **Welcome**

The Chairperson welcomed:

a) Mrs Cathy Taylor and Mr Ken Nelson, whom the Governing Body has recommended as 'co-opted members' to the Department. A police check has to be carried out before their membership of the Governing Body can be confirmed; they are attending the meeting in an 'in attendance' capacity.

b) Mr Hafidh Saled, a member of a Basra economic development delegation currently visiting Northern Ireland with a view to attracting private sector investment.

#### **17.1 Apologies**

Apologies were received from Mrs A M Campbell, Ms J Fullerton, Rev T Jamieson, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Ms C O'Neill and Mrs L Wallis.

#### **17.2 Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests. The Chairperson advised Members that it was necessary to update, where necessary, their Declaration of Interests statements.

#### **17.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 10 June 2009 were approved.

#### **17.4 Matters Arising**

##### **17.4.1 Membership of Governing Body (minute 16.5.1)**

The Governing Body noted that the Department for Employment and Learning had placed an advertisement in the press for the competition to find a new Governor to replace Dr Caul. Interviews are scheduled for 9 and 10 November 2009.

##### **17.4.2 The Establishment of an Education Committee.**

The Director advised Members that the Articles of Government make provision for Colleges to establish Committees, in addition to the Audit and Finance and General Purposes Committees, to undertake particular functions such as the College's curricular provision. He recommended and **the Governing Body agreed that:**

- a) An Education Committee should be established with terms of reference, which had been circulated to Members;
- b) The following Governors should serve as Members of the Committee: Mr T Neilands, Mr K Nelson, Mrs U O'Kane, Mrs C Taylor and Mr A Watt.
- c) The Governing Body should appoint a further Governor to the Committee to bring it into line with the other Committees, which have six members.
- d) The first meeting of the Committee should be arranged for Tuesday 3 November 2009 at the Ballymena Campus at 5.30 pm.

#### 17.4.3 Lecturers' Contract (minute 16.9)

The Director reported that the new lecturers' contract had been agreed with the Trade Unions and had been implemented with effect from 1 September 2009.

#### 17.4.4 Improving Quality Raising Standards (minute 16.11)

The Director reminded Members that the College had submitted a self-evaluation report to DEL on IQRS in which it assessed its overall performance to be satisfactory but with some areas for improvement; it, therefore, awarded itself a Grade 4. The Director advised Governors that the Education Training and Inspectorate had decided that a higher grade would be more appropriate and had awarded the College a Grade 2. The Governing Body congratulated the staff concerned on this encouraging award.

### 17.5 Chairperson's Communications

#### 17.5.1 Governance Healthcheck

The Chairperson informed Members that the 2009/2010 Governance Healthcheck would be conducted on-line by LSDA. A link has now been forwarded to all Governors to enable them to access, complete and submit their surveys by 6 November 2009.

### 17.6 Director's Report

The Director drew Members' attention to a number of issues mentioned in his Newsletter:

- a) Apprenticeships. One of the significant additions to the Training Programme during the current academic year has been the introduction of Programme Led Apprenticeships. This is a contingency measure introduced by DEL in response to the lack of employment opportunities for apprentices, owing to the economic downturn. It was noted that students on this programme were at the College three days per week instead of the usual two involving the NRC in additional expense. The Director informed Members that negotiations were proceeding with the Department regarding funding. The Governing Body registered its concern in relation to this matter. Although it welcomed the initiative and was pleased that the Deputy Director Support and Development was involved in its development, it wished to have it relayed to DEL that a speedy resolution to the funding situation was required, as the College was not in a position to subsidise the programme.
- b) Big Lottery Project. Confirmation has been received from the Big Lottery that funding amounting to £3/4 million will be made available for the Magherafelt Lifelong Learning Project.
- c) National Training Award. The Director reported that the College in conjunction with Schlumberger would receive a National Training Award at a ceremony on 13 October 2009. The training module developed in conjunction with Schlumberger has been delivered by a team from the College in Singapore, Houston and Belfast with the possibility of Shanghai next year.

d) Graduation Ceremonies. The Director informed the Governing Body that Graduation Ceremonies would be held in the afternoon of Thursday 12 and in the morning and afternoon of Friday 13 November 2009 at the Galgorm Manor Hotel. Governors would receive an invitation to the ceremonies.

### **17.7 Correspondence**

The Governing Body noted the following correspondence:

a) Correspondence from the Public Accounts Committee, Department of Finance and Personnel, dated 16 September 2009, regarding the Review of Financial Management in the Further Education Sector in Northern Ireland and Governance Examination in Fermanagh FE College. It was noted that several of the Public Accounts Committee's recommendations have implications for the Governing Body such as training and support needs. The Director drew attention to a recommendation that DEL, in light of the significant cash balances of certain Colleges, should only release funding on the basis of need.

b) Correspondence from DEL, dated 28 September 2009, regarding reductions to the recurrent block grant 2009/2010. It was noted that DEL has decided to implement a £5 million reduction to the recurrent block grants by the utilisation of £5 million of College reserves. Colleges, with reserves in excess of 10% of their prior year income, will be required to make a contribution to the £5 million reduction. An agreed amount will be deducted from the monthly instalment of block grants during the last six months of the financial year 2009/2010. As NRC has no reserves in excess of 10% it will not experience any reduction of recurrent block grant.

The Director expressed regret that £5 million would be lost to the Sector and he predicted that the remainder of reserves held by Colleges would come under scrutiny during the next financial year. Despite the reductions he advised that Colleges would still be expected to meet targets set in conjunction with DEL and the Skills agenda would remain a priority.

### **17.8 Minutes of the Audit Committee**

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meetings of the Audit Committee held on 24 June 2009 and 22 September 2009.

#### **a) Audit Committee 24 June 2009**

The Governing Body noted the:

i) Pre-meeting of Audit Committee, less staff representatives, with the Auditors. It was now necessary to have pre-meetings to comply with the requirements of the Financial Memorandum;

ii) Following Reports issued by the Internal Auditors:

(a) Internal Audit Process Improvement Review of Student Support Services with a focus on College Transport Arrangements. This was a non-assurance review.

(b) Human Resources and Payroll

The Internal Auditors provided an overall assurance of 'substantial' and gave 'substantial' ratings for the following key processes: appointment process, use and payment of agency staff, Human Resource management system, payroll operations and payroll grading for part-time staff.

There were no priority 1 issues identified during the course of the review.

(c) Regulatory Compliance – Data Protection and Freedom of Information.

The Internal Auditors provided an overall assurance rating of 'satisfactory'.

There was only one priority 1 issue identified during the course of the review, which relates to the fact that the College has developed a number of policies but has not formalised them.

(d) Internal Audit Review of Procurement & Contracting

The Internal Auditors provided an overall assurance rating of 'satisfactory'. For the key processes they provided 'satisfactory' ratings for the purchase order process and the invoice process and 'limited' assurance for the tendering process and the contract monitoring process.

There were no priority 1 issues identified during the course of the review but the Internal Auditors highlighted a number of priority 2 and 3 issues.

(e) Internal Audit Review of Risk Management, Corporate Governance and Budgetary Control

The Internal Auditors provided an overall assurance rating of 'substantial'. For the key processes they provided 'satisfactory' ratings for risk management and compliance with Financial Memorandum, and 'substantial' ratings for corporate governance and budgetary control.

There were no priority 1 issues identified during the course of the review but the Internal Auditors drew attention to a number of priority 2 and 3 issues.

iii) Internal Audit Plan for the 2009/2010, which is in line with the three-year strategic internal audit plan (1 August 2007 – 31 July 2010)

iv) Internal Audit Follow-Up Review providing a progress report with regard to recommendations issued by the Auditors.

v) Annual Internal Audit Report to the Audit Committee, which summarises the work performed by the Internal Auditors during 2008/2009

vi) External Audit Plan for the year ended 31 July 2009.

**b) Audit Committee 22 September 2009**

The Governing Body noted the:

i) Priority 1 Recommendations. The Internal Auditors expressed satisfaction with a Report relating to the implementation of Priority 1 Recommendations of the Internal and External Auditors.

ii) Letter of Engagement and Internal Audit Charter. The Committee noted a letter of engagement from PricewaterhouseCooper and approved the Internal Audit Charter.

iii) Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Committee received the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2009. It was noted that the Finance & General Purposes Committee (10 November 2009) and the Audit Committee (17 November 2009) would give detailed consideration to the audited Accounts and make recommendations to the Governing Body (25 November 2009) for their approval.

iv) Financial Audit and Support Team (FAST) Report. The Committee received a copy of the FAST Audit Inspection of Care to Learn Support Fund (a limited assurance was provided for this small fund of some £30k) and the Additional Support Fund for Students with Learning Difficulties (a satisfactory assurance was provided).

## **17.9 Annual Report Finance and General Purposes Committee**

The Governing Body received the Annual Report of the Finance and General Purposes Committee for 2008/2009, which detailed the work of the Committee during the financial year 2008/2009 and highlighted the reports prepared in line with the annual financial returns timetable issued by DEL. It was noted that the Annual Report had been submitted to the Governing Body as a result of a recommendation from the Internal Auditors.

## **17.10 Annual Report Staffing Committee**

The Governing Body received the Annual Report of the Staffing Committee for 2008/2009, which provided a summary of the activities undertaken during the academic year 2008/2009 such as the implementation of policies, the monitoring of appointments and arrangements for voluntary redundancies of support staff.

## **17.11 Business Improvement Plan**

The Director advised Members that following the decision taken by the Governing Body at its meeting on 10 June 2009 to produce a Five-Year Business Improvement Plan, arrangements had been put in place over the summer to implement the project.

Following the appointment of Grant Thornton as consultants, the Director, the Director of Finance and members of the consultancy team met with the Director of FE Division DEL to make the Department aware of the project and to request input to defining the parameters of the project. The project was officially launched at a 'Project Mobilisation Day' for the wider College Management Team.

The Director referred to a copy of the Project Plan, which outlines the methodology and timescales and a copy of the minutes of the meeting of the First Project Board, which had been circulated to Members. He said that the project would be overseen by a Project Board, consisting of four members of the Governing Body (Mrs K Collins, Mr P McCudden, Mrs A Rankin and Mrs L Wallis), the Executive Management Team and the Management Accountant. The Project Board would meet on at least three occasions: once for the initiation of the Project, once to assess progress in the middle of the project and at the end to agree the final version of the plan.

He informed the Governing Body that a Project Management Team, consisting of the EMT, Head of Estates, Head of HR, a Head of Faculty and the Management Accountant, would meet on a weekly basis to manage the project at an operational level and to receive and analyse information from the following Working Groups: Curriculum, Estates, Staffing and Finance. The Project Management Team would also meet with recognised Trade Union representatives for Lecturing and Support Staff at least three times during the duration of the project.

The Director explained that Committees would be involved in the process and a special meeting of the Governing Body would be arranged in January to consider the Final Report.

## **17.12 Enrolments**

The Governing Body received a Report prepared by the Deputy Director Curriculum concerning Full-Time Further Education enrolments for 2008/2010. It was noted that full-time recruitment to-date had increased from 3,070 in 2008/2009 to 3,367 in 2009/2010. Provided retention rates can be improved, the College is well placed to achieve the target set by DEL. The Deputy Director informed Members that class sizes had been enlarged to enable the increase in enrolments to be accommodated in the same number of classes.

The Deputy Director stated that there had been an increase in Full-Time Higher Education enrolments. There had been 262 enrolments, which was above the MASN cap of 249, set by DEL. He said that it was critical to retain HE students in order to achieve the MASN target.

It was noted that a paper on Part-Time enrolments would be forwarded to the first meeting of the Education Committee

b) The Governing Body received a Report on Enrolment Trends for the new cohort 2009/2010 Full-Time Training Provision, prepared by the Deputy Director Support and Development. Members were advised that the overall picture of total enrolment was still emerging as a result of the staggered approach to registration on the Training Programme. It was noted that there had been substantial changes to the training provision, such as the 2-Year Programme Led Apprenticeship, making 'like with like' comparisons difficult. The Deputy Director stated that the new intake enrolment of 574 students for Training in September 2009, represented an increase of approximately of 1% on 2008/2009 and ensured that the College had met its planned overall target for 2009/2010.

The Deputy Director highlighted a number of key issues arising from her Report including: the decline in employed status apprenticeships from 65% in 2007/2008 to 17% in 2009/2010; the significant decline in electrical instillation and plumbing; the development of a costing model for training, which has been taken up by the Sector; and the increasing difficulty of securing good, relevant work placements.

### **17.13 Education and Training Inspectorate Report and Training Plan**

The Director reminded Members that the Education and Training Inspectorate had conducted a Focussed Inspection of the Priority Skills Areas at Level II in May 2009. The Inspectorate had expressed satisfaction with the quality of provision, teaching and learning, and standard of students but had indicated a number of areas for improvement. He advised Members that the Report of the Inspection required a response from the Governing Body in the form of an Action Plan, which would be reviewed in a follow-up visit by ETI.

In response to a query the Director advised Governors that the Education Committee would receive updates regarding the implementation of targets set in the Action Plan. A Member suggested that the College, given the present financial climate, may find difficulty in implementing some of the improvements detailed in the Action Plan

The Governing Body **approved the Action Plan.**

The Director informed the Governing Body that the ETI would be visiting the College on a number of occasions during the forthcoming months to inspect Cultural Diversity and Priority Skills Areas at Level 3 and to monitor Essential skills provision. A follow-up to the Priority Skills Level 2 inspection would follow in 12-18 months.

### **17.14 Equality Issues**

The Director of Finance presented three reports dealing with equality issues:

a) Annual Progress Report Equality Commission for N Ireland

The Governing Body noted the Annual Progress Report, which had been forwarded to the Equality Commission to meet a deadline of 31 August 2009. The Director of Finance informed Governors that she had advised the Commission that the Report was subject to possible adjustments following the meeting of the Governing Body on 7 October 2009. She highlighted the following key developments during the period (1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009): the establishment of an Equality Unit staffed by an Equality Officer and part of the Finance Directorate; the establishment of a new Policy Development Process to provide an auditable trail of College policies; the development of an NRC Screening Template to support staff in the screening of policies and decisions; and the re-establishment of the College Equality Working Group to mainstream equality duties throughout the organisation.

The Director of Finance requested Members to let her have any comments on the Report by 16 October 2009 for submission to the Equality Commission.

b) Equality Action Plan

The Governing Body received the Equality Action Plan 2009/2010, which details the development of equality policies, the delivery of staff training, raising the awareness of staff and students, the development of consultation practice and the establishment of partnerships. The Director of Finance also circulated, for information, a recently published 'Guide to Equality and Diversity'. It was suggested that in future equality issues should be included in the remit of the Education Committee.

**The Governing Body considered and approved the Equality Action Plan 2009/2010.**

c) Disability Action Plan 2008/2010.

The Governing Body received a copy of the Disability Action Plan 2008/2010. It was noted that the Plan covers the period from February 2008 to August 2010 and for ease of monitoring it had been divided into three phases: Phase 1 February 2008 to 31 August 2008, Phase 2 1 September 2008 to 30 June 2009 and Phase 3 1 July 2009 to 30 June 2010.

It was further noted that the Disability Action Plan involves the development of detailed guidance and training for staff, the establishment of professional standards for inclusive learning, the alignment and development of College policies and procedures, and the identification of positive action measures.

**After consideration the Governing Body endorsed the Disability Action Plan 2008/2010.**

#### **17.15 Student Equal Opportunities Policy**

The Director of Finance presented the Student Equal Opportunities Policy, the aim of which is to communicate the College's commitment to the promotion of Equality of Opportunities and Good Relations amongst the student population.

The Director of Finance stated that the College seeks to prevent direct and indirect, overt and covert discrimination and to instil equality, fairness and good relations into the ethos of the College. She said that any student who believes that he or she has been the subject of discrimination or harassment has recourse to the College's harassment and grievance procedures. The Governing Body noted that the College has an obligation under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, to monitor the effectiveness of its policies and practices.

The Governing Body noted that the Policy would be placed on the intranet to enable access by students.

**After consideration the Governing Body approved the Student Equal Opportunities Policy.**

#### **17.16 Acceptable User Policies**

The Deputy Director Planning and Resources presented two Acceptable User Policies, one for Staff and one for Students. It was noted that the documents define the College's policy for the acceptable use of computing and data communications facilities. Users are bound by the policy at all times when using equipment, software or services provided by the College. Violation may result in disciplinary action.

**After consideration the Governing Body approved the Acceptable User Policies for Staff and Students.**

## **17.17 Any Other Notified Business**

### 17.17.1 Student Governor

The Deputy Director Support & Development advised that elections were taking place for student representatives and she would report progress on the appointment of a Student Governor to the next meeting of the Governing Body.

### 17.17.2 Key Performance Indicators

It was noted that Sector-wide Key Performance Indicators were still not in place. A view was expressed that NRC should make use of existing KPIs to monitor its own performance. The Director advised the Governing Body that KPIs would be built into the Business Improvement Plan.

The Director of Finance undertook to prepare a paper on KPIs for the next meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee.

## **17.18 Next Meeting**

It was noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 25 November 2009 at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus at 5.30 pm.

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