

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at 5.30 pm on 6 October 2010 at the Newtownabbey Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Mr G Gilpin (Chairman), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mrs A M Campbell, Mrs K Collins, Mr J Cromie, Mr I Goldsworthy, Rev T Jamieson, Mr R Jay, Mr P McCudden, Mr K Nelson, Mrs U O'Kane, Ms C O'Neill and Mrs L Wallis

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

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

Tour of New Build Centre and Refurbishment Works at Newtownabbey

Mr Gilpin expressed his thanks, on behalf of the Governing Body, to the Director and Senior Management for an impressive tour of the New Build Centre and refurbishment works at Newtownabbey. The new facility provides a Transport Skills Centre, Construction and Engineering facilities and a new canteen with a student social area. Existing Engineering and Motor Vehicle facilities have also been refurbished. Mr Gilpin said that the staff he had met during the tour had all expressed a pride of place and satisfaction with their new facilities.

The Director thanked the Head of Estates, Mr H Matchett, and the Estates Team for their endeavours over the past 18 months, which had resulted in the project's completion on schedule.

Chairman's Address

In his opening address the New Chairman, Mr Gilpin, thanked the Governing Body for its welcome. He explained that he had had experience of Further Education as a Governor of the previous Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education. He described himself as a facilitator and strategic thinker and said that he hoped to use his expertise to assist with the strategic direction of the College.

27.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mrs A Rankin, Mrs C Taylor and Mr A Watt.

27.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests. It was noted that a number of Members had still to update their Declaration of Interests. The Chair requested that all Declarations should be returned to the Secretary as a matter of urgency.

27.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 17 August 2010 were approved.

27.4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

27.5 Chairman's Communications

The Chairman drew a number of points to the attention of the Governing Body:

a) Governing Body Posts. He thanked Mrs Collins and Mr P McCudden, who had acted up as Chair and Vice-Chair of the Governing Body during the interim period, when the College had not had a permanent Chairperson. He advised Governors that Mrs Collins would revert to her previous position as Vice-Chair of Governing Body. He confirmed that Mrs Collins would continue as Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, Mrs Alison Rankin as Chair of the Audit Committee, Mrs Una O’Kane as Chair of the Education Committee and Mr Sam Davidson as Chair of the Staffing Committee.

b) Membership of Committees. It was noted that Mrs Campbell, due to pressure of work, would no longer serve on the Staffing Committee but would continue as a Member of the Audit Committee.

c) Meetings. He informed Governors that he had attended the following meetings on behalf of the Governing Body:

(i) DEL Induction Training. He and Mr Goldsworthy had attended the Sector Induction Training session organised by the Department for Employment and Learning;

(ii) Annual Accountability Meeting with Permanent Secretary. He had formed part of a College delegation to meet with the Permanent Secretary of DEL to discuss the Business Improvement Plan;

(iii) Association of Northern Ireland Colleges (ANIC). He had attended an overnight session to discuss the strategic direction of ANIC.

The Chairman added that he hoped to meet with members of the Executive Management Team in the near future.

27.6 Director’s Report

The Director drew Members’ attention to the following issues:

a) Annual Accountability Meeting. Discussion on the Business Improvement Plan featured prominently in the Annual Accountability Meeting with the Permanent Secretary Department for Employment and Training. Complimentary comments were made regarding the College’s performance in ETI Inspections and in Audit Reports.

b) Higher Education Graduation Ceremonies. Arrangements have been finalised for this year’s HE Graduation ceremonies at the Tullyglass Hotel, Ballymena on Wednesday 20 October 2010 (pm) and Thursday 21 October 2010 (am and pm). The Director stated that all Governors had received an invitation to attend these ceremonies

c) Video Link with Morehead State University, Kentucky. The College hosted an event on 28 September 2010 to celebrate its involvement with the Sisters Cities relationship between Ballymena and Morehead. During the week 27 September – 1 October 2010 two students and two staff from the School of Engineering and Science were visiting Morehead as part of the partnership developed between both institutions. A video link with Morehead allowed the students to personally thank the Mayor and Members of the Ballymena Borough Council for their generous financial support. The Director advised the meeting that the Council had agreed to provide funding for the education partnership for the next three years. He thanked for Mrs O’Kane and Alderman McAvoy for attending the session.

d) Belfast Telegraph Roadshow. The Director was a member of a panel at a Roadshow in Ballymoney at which members of the public were invited to pose questions on local issues and concerns.

e) Association of Northern Ireland Colleges. The ANIC Board held an overnight session on 23/24 September 2010 to review the strategic priorities for the year ahead. The Chair of ANIC has stood down and the Director is filling the position of Acting Chair pending the appointment of a new Chair. In this capacity the Director will be chairing an Appointments Panel to replace Mr John D'Arcy, who is leaving after seven years in the post to become Director of the Open University in Ireland.

f) Sexual Health Clinic. The College, in a joint venture with the Northern Health and Social Care Trust, is to establish a Sexual Health Clinic to operate one day per week in the Trostan Avenue building.

g) Meetings. The Director provided details of a number of significant meetings that he attended during July, August and September 2010.

h) Knowledge and Information Transfer and Exchange (KITE) Project. It was hoped to launch the KITE project on 11 November 2010; Ministers from the governments of the three participating Colleges had been invited to attend.

i) Official Opening of the New Build Centre Newtownabbey. A provisional date of 8 December 2010 had been set for the official opening of the New Build Centre at Newtownabbey.

27.7 Correspondence

The Chairman informed Governors of a letter, dated 24 September 2010, which he had received from Mr McKeown, the Regional Official of the University and College Union, concerning compensation for dismissal by reason of redundancy. Mr McKeown draws attention to the collective agreement in the Schools Sector and states that the FE Sector has still to reach a collective agreement in relation to compensation for redundancy and premature retirement. He requests the Chairman to use his influence to arrive at a resolution to this issue in the immediate future.

The Governing agreed that:

a) A copy of the letter be circulated to Governors; and

b) The matter be addressed by the Staffing Committee.

27.8 Audit Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 21 September 2010. It was noted that the following topics had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Departmental Risk Registers. The Committee received a presentation from Mr Gerard Quinn, Head of the Faculty of Social Care and Early Years, Hair and Beauty Therapies, Access and Community, regarding the main risks facing his faculty and the mechanisms in place to minimise these. It was noted that the Faculty had a continuous monitoring process to inform its Faculty Risk Register and that the monitoring process was conducted in conjunction with the Faculty Operational Plan. It was further noted that Mr. Quinn had bi-annual reviews of the Departmental Risk Register, which are submitted to the Risk Management Group for consideration.

b) Chairperson's Communications. The Chairperson drew the Committee's attention to two documents:

(i) Managing Public Money, which sets out the main principles for dealing with resources used by the public sector organisations. The Committee noted that Annex 4.4 regarding procurement control limits did not reflect those indicated in the Financial Memorandum. It was further noted that the Department was due to issue a revised Financial Memorandum regularised by 1 October 2010, and amendments to same would not be applied in retrospect.

(ii) Report of Independent Review Team to the Accounting Officers of the Department of Rural Development (DRD) and Northern Ireland Water (NIW), which examines procurement issues within NIW. It was noted that the Director of Finance had conducted a review of procurement governance within NRC when this issue first emerged and the College had introduced a system to deal with single tender actions, all of which had to be signed off by the Director. It was noted that DEL receives an annual report on such transactions. The Committee agreed that it should receive a mid-year report on all such transactions as well as the end of year report, which is forwarded to DEL.

c) Correspondence. The Committee received the following correspondence:

(i) Letter dated 9 July 2010 regarding the Land and Property Service IT Replacement Project Lessons Learned Report.

(ii) Letter dated 27 May 2010 regarding Memoranda of Reply to NI Assembly Public Accounts Committee Reports in relation to the performance of the Health Service and the Planning Service. The Committee noted that the College had a partnership with the Northern Trust and was meeting the guidance described in the Report.

d) Draft Annual Report and Financial Statements. The Committee received the draft Annual Report and Financial Statements for the year ended 31 July 2010. It was noted that the Annual Report and Financial Statements would be forwarded to the Finance and General Purposes Committee (9 November 2010) and the Governing Body (24 November 2010) for approval and submission to the Department.

The Director of Finance provided a summary of the Financial Statements and advised the Committee that the College had reported an historic surplus of £939k compared with an original estimated deficit of £747k. The original estimated budget did not include the FRS 17 adjustment of £1,446k included in the Income and Expenditure Account. It was noted that the College had an accumulated income and expenditure reserve of £2,945k and cash balances of £5,272k. It was also noted that the Key Performance Indicator relating to Cash Days indicates that the number of Cash Days had declined to 58 compared with a sector average of 80. The Director of Finance advised the Committee that the number of Cash Days was at its lower limit. It was also noted that the ratio of staff costs to expenditure had increased from 67.5 % (2007/2008) to 73.68 % (2009/2010). The College's ratio had increased as a result of declining expenditure on IT and maintenance.

e) Outstanding Internal Audit Issues. The Committee received a progress report regarding outstanding audit issues and noted that five of the 12 outstanding audit issues had been fully implemented as at 21 September 2010 and 7 partially implemented. The Chairperson stressed the need to fully implement all outstanding issues as a matter of urgency.

f) Internal Audit Reports. The Internal Auditor presented:

(i) **Internal Audit Report to Audit Committee**, which provides the Audit Committee with a classification of audit assurance, a key to priorities and a summary status of the Internal Audit Plan 2010/2011.

(ii) **Internal Audit Needs Assessment 2010/2011 Document**, which assesses the internal audit needs of the Northern Regional College and provides a revised Internal Audit Plan covering the twelve-month period ending 31 July 2011.

g) Accountability Meeting. The Director reported that he, the current and former Chairs of the Governing Body, the Chair of the Audit Committee and the Director of Finance had attended an Accountability meeting at the Department. He advised the Committee that the College had experienced a procurement problem in relation to the re-engagement of Grant Thornton to help complete the additional work on financial projections and scenario planning as required by DEL. The matter has now been resolved and it has been agreed that the College should

process this as a single tender transaction as the sum involved amounted to some £2,000. The Committee supported this course of action.

27.9 Catering Arrangements

The Director of Finance gave a presentation to the Governing Body regarding catering arrangements at the College. She reminded the meeting that the Audit Committee (29 June 2010) had received a Report from the Internal Auditors identifying the advantages and disadvantages of various options in relation to Catering arrangements at the College. It was noted that the Audit Committee had agreed that the Governing Body and Management should give consideration to the issues raised in the Report.

She explained that there were three strands of provision within the College: college internally operated canteens; college curriculum canteens; and external canteen service with a third party provider Eurest. She said that these facilities had made a significant loss over the past three years: the projected deficit, excluding Teaching Staff costs, for 2009/2010 was £412k. She advised that the Internal Auditors had provided three options for the College to consider:

- a) Option One. Continue with existing arrangements.
- b) Option Two. Fully outsource all catering arrangements.
- c) Option Three. Provide all College catering from in-house capability.

She suggested a further course of action, which would be a combination of all three options.

Mrs Moore outlined the various recommendations of the Internal Auditors and drew Governors' attention to Management's response, which had been presented as an Action Plan. She indicated that a final report would be submitted to the EMT in March 2011 and forwarded to a subsequent meeting of the Governing Body for consideration and approval. **The Governing Body agreed that the Finance and General Purposes Committee should be responsible for monitoring progress.**

Mrs Moore made reference to the Student Feedback Questionnaire of 2009/2010, which indicated that most students made use of canteen facilities; only 5% stated that they did not use the facilities. She said that respondents had made complaints about the price and range of food.

During discussion Members raised queries regarding implementation dates and profit sharing arrangements with external caterers. It was also noted that the Sector Finance Directors were giving consideration to a Sector approach to catering arrangements.

27.10 Student Enrolments

The Governing Body received a paper detailing the position in relation to full-time student recruitment to Further Education, Higher Education and Training for 2010/2011. It was noted that enrolments are substantially complete and figures and trends are as follows:

- a) Full-Time Further Education. The College has slightly undershot its enrolment target (3,335 compared with a target of 3,356) but has reduced the number of classes running compared with 2009/2010. Provided retention rates can be improved the College is well placed to achieve the FLU target set by DEL.

Mr Houston indicated that classes in several areas, notably IT, Science, Social Care and Motor Vehicle, had been over-subscribed and students without places had been directed by staff to other suitable courses. He advised that the upward trend in Engineering and Science recruitment had continued. Referring to a question concerning competition, he said that there was strong evidence that local schools had reduced their entrance requirements for return to 6th form and this had resulted in a loss of some students, who would normally have come to

the College. Some schools offering similar vocational courses to the College were also providing competition.

b) Full-Time Higher Education. Mr Houston said that the College has a MaSN allocation of 249 full-time HE places. It had enrolled 276 students and would anticipate that the drop-out during the year would leave the figure at the MaSN cap.

c) Full-Time Training. Dr O'Mullan stated that actual training enrolment at 1 October 2010 was 1,011, which is 109 less than target. The new intake is down on previous years, reflecting a number of Business Improvement Plan decisions including the planned withdrawal from Painting and Decorating and Special Needs (the FE funded route) as well as a decline in a number of construction trade enrolments.

She indicated that two intakes for the sponsored Engineering Training provision had been recruited, one in Ballymena and a new one in Newtownabbey, which reflects the continuing commitment by local employers for this type of provision. During a Sector Economic Engagement event at Stormont, which she had attended earlier in the day, Ryobi had made positive comments about NRC Training and responsiveness.,

27.11 Self Evaluation Review

Mrs Collins advised the meeting that the Governing Body (13 January 2010) had agreed to conduct a Self Evaluation Review (SER), which was the method used for the evaluation of performance throughout the College.

A workshop session was arranged, prior to the meeting of the Governing Body on 23 June 2010, to enable the completion of a SER on the performance of the Governing Body during 2009/2010. Suzanne Kennedy, Head of Quality Improvement, acted as facilitator.

Subsequent to the session the Head of Quality Improvement and the Secretary drafted the SER to reflect the views expressed by Governors at the Workshop.

She said that the following grades had been awarded to the Governing Body:

- a) Leadership and Management: Very Good
- b) Achievements and Standards: Good
- c) Quality of Provision for Learning: Good
- d) Overall grade: Good

Mrs Collins indicated that the Key Priorities for Quality Improvement and Development for the Governing Body for 2010/2011 are:

- a) The creation of more opportunities for Governors to meet with staff and students at each campus; and
- b) The use of the Education Committee to monitor KPIs.

The meeting discussed how the Governing Body intended to take forward the key priorities for 2010/2011. It was suggested that Governing Body meetings should rotate around the various campuses providing Members with an opportunity to meet staff and students and to familiarise themselves with their work. The Chairman asked the Student Governor to provide feedback as to how students wish to interact with the Governing Body and he suggested that, in addition to a self-evaluation exercise it would be helpful to have an evaluation by the Executive Management Team. This would enable Governors to obtain not only details of their own perceptions but also EMT perceptions of their effectiveness.

The Governing Body agreed that:

a) The EMT be asked to review the work of the Governing Body;

b) The Self Evaluation Review and the Key Priorities for Quality Improvement and Development for 2010/2011 be approved.

27.12 Education and Training Inspectorate

The Director reminded Members that the Governing Body, at its meeting on 23 June 2010, had received an account of the verbal feedback provided by the ETI Inspectorate Team, who had conducted an inspection of the Priority Skills Areas (PSA) at Level 3.

It was noted that a written Report had been received over the summer period. The Report indicates that in the professional and technical area of manufacturing and mechanical engineering the quality of education provided by the College is very good; in the professional and technical areas of computing and information and communications technology, and electrical and electronic engineering, the quality is good; and in the professional and technical area of construction, the quality is satisfactory. The overall quality provided by the College is deemed to be good.

The Director advised that the Governing Body is required to submit an action plan to ETI in response to the areas identified for improvement, all of which relate the area of construction and built environment. He explained that due to the gap between the June and October meetings of the Governing Body it had been necessary to forward the Action Plan to ETI. Since then a further communication had been received from ETI indicating that it is necessary for the College to address some principal areas for improvement in greater detail. The Director stated that it would still be possible to make amendments to the Action Plan for resubmission to ETI.

The Governing Body noted the contents of the ETI report **and approved the Action Plan prepared in response to the areas identified for improvement.**

It was noted that an interim progress report would be submitted to the Education Committee

27.13 Any Other Notified Business

There was no other notified business.

27.14 Date of the Next Meeting

The Governing Body noted that the next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 24 November 2010 at 5.30 pm at the Ballymena Campus.

