

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held at 5.30 pm on 12 January 2011 at the Ballymena Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Mr G Gilpin (Chairman), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mrs AM Campbell, Mrs K Collins, Mr J Cromie, Mr I Goldsworthy, Mr R Jay, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden, Mr K Nelson, Mrs U O'Kane, Ms C O'Neill, Ms A Rankin, Mrs C Taylor and Mr A Watt.

In Attendance Mrs B Crotty, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Dr C O'Mullan and Mr JA Hunter.
Mrs C Bell, Mr R Kenny and Dr M McIvor, representatives from DEL, attended for minutes 30.8 and 30.17. 1 and 2.

Prior to the meeting Governors attended a small reception to congratulate Dr Brian Hill, Head of School Engineering & Science on the award of an MBE for services to Further Education and Training and Mr Michael Galloway on the award of a Gold Medal in the UK Skills Competition. The Chairman, the Director, Governors and NRC staff joined to celebrate the meritorious awards.

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

30.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Rev T Jamieson and Mrs L Wallis.

30.2 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

The Chairman advised the Governing Body that all members had now completed their Declaration of Interests pro formas. He advised Governors that it is their responsibility to ensure that their declarations are kept up to date. In the event of any change of circumstances Members should inform the Secretary and make appropriate changes to their entries.

30.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 22 November 2010 were approved.

30.4 Matters Arising

There were no matters arising.

30.5 Chairman's Communications

30.5.1 Appointments and Re-appointments to Governing Body

The Chairman referred to a letter he had received from DEL, dated 4 January 2011, concerning the appointment/re-appointment of Members of the Governing Body, which advised that:

a) The first term of those members of the Governing Body, who were appointed through public competition in 2007, is due to expire on 31 July 2011 (Mrs AM Campbell, Mrs K Collins, Mr S Davidson, Alderman PJ McAvoy, Mr P McCudden, Mrs A Rankin and Mrs L Wallis);

b) The first term for the ELB members is due to end on 2 April 2012 (Rev T Jamieson, Mrs U O’Kane);

c) The first term of staff members is also due to end at the latter part of 2011 (Ms C O’Neill, Mr A Watt);

d) The issue of the current co-optees to the Governing Body is less urgent since these are not due for re-appointment until 1 November 2013 (Ms C Taylor, Mr K Nelson).

The Chairman advised that Members may be appointed for a second term subject to evidence of effective performance and continuing adherence to the principles of public life. Accordingly the Department has written to those Members appointed through public competition, whose first term of appointment is due to end on 31 July 2011, inviting expressions of interest in re-appointment. This will inform the number of vacancies to be filled by public competition. The Department will write to the Chairman towards the end of March 2011, asking if those members seeking re-appointment continue to demonstrate effective service and adherence to the principles of public life.

It was noted that Staff Members of the Governing Body would be asked to submit themselves for re-election, where appropriate, before their re-appointment to the Governing Body is considered.

30.5.2 Engagements

The Chairman advised the Governing Body that he had had a number of engagements since the last meeting including attendance at the official opening of the New Build Centre, Newtownabbey and a meeting with the Permanent Secretary to which he was accompanied by the Director and Director of Finance. He also stated that he had attended a Colleges Northern Ireland Board meeting regarding the recruitment of a Chief Executive.

30.6 Director’s Report

The Director drew Members’ attention to the following issues:

a) Graduation Ceremonies. The Director stated that three successful FE and TfS/ApprenticeshipsNI Graduation Ceremonies had taken place at Ballymena, Coleraine and Newtownabbey in December 2010.

b) New Build Centre. The new DEL Minister, Mr Danny Kennedy, had attended the official opening of the New Build Centre, Newtownabbey on 8 December 2010.

c) Inclement Weather. The Director advised the Governing Body that he had had to close the College on two days before Christmas due to severe weather conditions.

d) Assembly Employment and Learning Committee. The Director reported that the Committee would be paying a study visit to the Farm Lodge, Ballymena Campus on 26 January 2011. It was hoped that some Members of the Governing Body would be represented.

e) NRC Calendar. The Director informed Governors that the NRC Calendar, which had been circulated nationally and internationally, had been sponsored by Rodney Miller Associates. The calendar had been designed by Art and Design students and Rodney Miller Associates had presented a prize to the student with the best submission.

30.7 Correspondence

The Governing Body noted correspondence from the Department for Employment and Learning, dated 22 December 2010, advising that the Department had secured an additional £1.2m for allocation to Further Education Colleges through the recurrent block grant; £119,695 has been allocated to NRC for FE FLUs and £104,906 for ES FLUs. The Director stated that it would be necessary to amend the FLU Plan to reflect these additional allocations.

The Governing Body agreed that the College should update the original FLU Plan for submission to DEL by 14 January 2011. The Director advised that the revised Plan would be forwarded to the next meeting of the Education Committee.

30.8 Review of Further Education Governance Report

The Governing Body was joined by Mrs Bell, Mr Kenny and Dr McIvor, representatives from DEL, to discuss the Review of FE Governance Report. At the outset Mr Kenny gave a presentation in which he addressed the background to and the main issues arising from the Report. He also summarised the main conclusions and recommendations drawn from it. During the course of the presentation he made reference to a number of issues:

a) Accountability. The Department acknowledges that a balance has to be achieved between the demands by Colleges for greater autonomy and the demands placed on DEL to ensure full accountability for FE expenditure.

b) Incorporation. The incorporation of Colleges with effect from April 1998 had worked well, although some weaknesses had been revealed. *FE Means Business* concluded that the advantages of incorporation outweighed the weaknesses. Colleges, however, had not been able to achieve the outright autonomy to which some stakeholders had aspired.

c) The Learning and Skills Improvement Service (LSIS). The LSIS Report had recommended a less interventionist Department but this had to be reconciled with the criticisms of the PAC and its demands for a tighter regulatory framework.

d) Communication and Collaboration. The LSIS Report had referred to poor or ineffective communication between the Department and Colleges. This matter has been addressed by the establishment of the Strategic Partnership Board, launched in 2009.

e) Strategic Driver and Funding Body. Difficulties arise as DEL is both the strategic driver and funding body. In England, Scotland and Wales there is an intermediate body responsible for funding.

f) Role of Governing Bodies. Consultation with the Sector suggests that there is a lack of clarity about the roles and responsibilities of the Chair and Governors. A greater understanding of respective roles could be achieved by drawing up a Code of Governance.

g) Legislation and Regulatory Framework. There is a need to review the Legislation and Regulatory Framework to ensure consistency of approach and to underpin the recommendations of the Review.

h) Performance Management. An overall framework for the assessment of performance should be agreed with the FE Sector and applied to each College. Key Performance Indicators would be devised to measure performance.

i) Composition of Governing Bodies. The selection of Governors should be based solely on the knowledge and skills the Governing Body requires. In this context a staff forum and a student forum would be established with regular access to the Governing Body to replace Staff and Student Governors. A Skills Matrix should be developed and used to monitor and review members' skills and expertise.

j) **Governors' Council.** A **Governors' Council** should be established to meet with the Department and the Minister on a bi-annual basis.

h) **Remuneration of Chairs.** The Department remains convinced of the case for the remuneration of Chairs. However the risk of setting a precedent for other educational bodies, combined with the adverse financial climate in the public sector, remain major impediments to taking this proposal forward.

Mrs Bell explained that much work had been undertaken behind the scenes in regard to the Review. She referred to the struggle between the Sector's wish for greater autonomy and the Northern Ireland Assembly's wish to micro-manage FE.

During subsequent discussion Members made the following observations:

a) A Member suggested that DEL should demonstrate leadership and recommend remuneration for Chairs of Governing Bodies, who were responsible for multi-million businesses. Remuneration would lead to more effective chairmanship and avert occurrences such as the recent resignations of chairs of Governing Bodies.

b) Referring to the suggestion that Governing Bodies should adopt a formal mechanism for identifying suitable candidates, a Member expressed concern that approaches to suitable candidates could lead to an expectation that they would be selected.

c) The Chairman suggested that to overcome the shortage of members from the business community the Department should form a pool of persons with a business background from which Colleges could draw as and when necessary.

d) A Member expressed support for the establishment of a **Governors' Council**, which would enable Governors to meet not only Departmental representatives but also Governors from other Colleges.

e) A number of Governors expressed concern in regard to the recommendation to dispense with staff and student governors on the grounds that they represented the interests of their constituencies. A Member stated that staff and student governors were representatives of rather than representing staff and students and they brought another dimension to meetings of the Governing Body. The Student Governor added that DEL had still to discuss this matter with NUS/USI.

Noting that the Department required a response to the Report by the end of January 2011, the Chairman suggested that a **Small Working Party** be established to formulate the views of the Governing Body.

The Governing Body agreed that:

a) The Working Party should consist of Mr S Davidson, Mr J Cromie and Mr I Goldsworthy;

b) Governors should forward any comments on the Report to the Working Party via the Director's office.

It was noted that Governing Bodies were required to forward their views to Colleges Northern Ireland by the end of January 2011; Colleges Northern Ireland would then prepare a Sector report to be submitted to the Strategic Partnership Board, who would consider the responses and agree those recommendations to be taken forward. It was anticipated that implementation would begin in February 2011 on a project management basis.

30.9 Further Education Means Business Stocktaking Exercise

The Director advised that at a recent meeting of the FE Strategic Partnership Board it was decided that it would be a useful exercise to undertake a stock-take of progress since the last major Strategic Review of Further Education in 2004, commonly referred to as “FE Means Business”.

The Director said that the overall direction set for FE in 2004 was that it should be at the heart of lifelong learning in order to strengthen economic development; enhance social cohesion; and advance the individual’s skills and learning. The strategy proposed that these aims should be supported by three strategic objectives. The sector should be:

- a) A key driver of local, sub-regional and regional economic development;
- b) An active agent of social cohesion; and
- c) A major promoter of Lifelong Learning.

The Programme for Implementation for “FE Means Business” published in 2006 identified a number of success criteria for individual aspects of the programme. This document stated that “the vision for the FE sector is that by 2010 all elements of “FE Means Business” will have been implemented in full and will be operational in all Colleges across Northern Ireland”. It is, therefore, timely that progress towards this aspiration is reviewed. As part of the overall stock-taking exercise each College has been asked to make its comments in relation to a range of eleven of these success criteria. The Director referred to the draft response, which had been prepared for consideration by Governors.

The Governing Body agreed that;

- a) The draft response to the Strategic Partnership Board should be forwarded to all Governors;**
- b) Governors should be invited to forward comments to the Director by 18 January 2011 for incorporation in the final version, which would be circulated to the Governing Body prior to submission to the Strategic Partnership Board.**

30.10 Finance and General Purposes Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 1 December 2010. It was noted that the following topics had been discussed at the meeting:

- a) Catering Arrangements. The Committee noted that the Governing Body (6 October 2010) had received a Management Action Plan, which had been prepared in response to the Internal Auditors’ recommendations regarding catering arrangements. The Governing Body agreed that the Finance and General Purposes Committee would be responsible for monitoring progress in relation to the Plan. The Committee received a Progress Report, which indicated that satisfactory progress has been made towards achieving the targets set by Management. It noted that a number of steps had already been taken to enhance sales income and a Working Group was currently giving consideration to the three strands of provision within the College: internally operated canteens; curriculum canteens; and an external canteen service with a third party provider.
- b) Monthly Management Accounts. The Committee received the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 October 2010, which show a deficit of £537k on continuing operations and an historic deficit of £288k, £265k ahead of budget.
- c) Committee Terms of Reference. The Governing Body noted that the Committee had agreed a number of adjustments to its Terms of Reference. The Governing Body endorsed the revised Terms of Reference..

30.11 Staffing Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 1 December 2010. It was noted that the following topic had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Staffing Committee Action Plan 2010/2011 (minute 16.4.1). The Governing Body noted that the Committee had given consideration to and approved a revised Action Plan for 2010/2011.

30.12 Education Committee

The Governing Body received a report from the meeting of the Education Committee held on 11 January 2011. It was noted that the following topic had been discussed at the meeting:

a) Faculty Presentation. The Committee received a presentation from the Head of the Faculty Built Environment and Design regarding the work of the Faculty. At the outset Mr Lavery provided an overview of the Faculty in terms of its staff and student strengths and proceeded to carry out a SWOT analysis of the Faculty. In conclusion he said that there were several challenges facing the Faculty such as the need for quality improvement, the standardisation of course delivery across campuses and the maintenance of employer links to facilitate apprenticeships, work placements and industrial placements.

b) Entitlement Framework. The Committee noted that the new Department of Education/Department for Employment and Learning Entitlement Framework document had still not materialised. The Director advised that it would be inopportune to take any action until the document is published and considered by the Education Committee.

c) Recontracting for Apprenticeship Northern Ireland and Training for Success. The Committee received an update regarding the tendering process for the DEL contract. The tender document had to be uploaded to CPD by 17 January 2011. It was noted that it would be a two-stage process: Stage 1 Selection Criteria (February 2011) and Stage 2 Award of Contract (June 2011). The Deputy Director Support and Development advised that the College's submission would be similar to the current training provision; NRC would be tendering for AppsNI and TfS. She explained that the tender would be across 9 Core Areas (Moyle to Newtownabbey) and 4 boundary Council Areas. The College had declined an invitation to subcontract to managing agents such as ETT, PMST and ETS in line with the Sector approach.

The Director emphasised that the tender submission was not pre-empting the Governing Body Strategic Planning Workshop, where consideration would be given to related strategic curriculum issues.

c) Quality Improvement Update. The Committee received a Quality Improvement Report, which indicated that the College had been involved in a Priority Skills Area Level 2 Follow-Up Inspection by the Education and Training Inspectorate as well as a number of other small-scale inspections, surveys and quality initiatives since September 2010. It also noted that preparations were ongoing for a range of inspections, reviews and surveys for the remainder of the year. A Member suggested that some members of staff were suffering from inspection fatigue such as the frequency of inspections; the Chairperson questioned whether there was a link between the frequency and depth of inspections and quality improvement.

d) Student Council. Mr Cromie, the Student President, presented the Student Council Report, which provided an overview of Council activities during 2009/2010 and projections for 2010/2011. The Committee noted that this was only the second year of the Student Council and it acknowledged that the Council had made substantial efforts to raise the awareness of its work and its role in the Student Voice.

The Director said that he was impressed with the leadership given by the Student President and his Deputies. He added that Mr Cromie had set a good example as Student President and had enhanced the status of the office.

e) Performance of NRC Curriculum and Associated Provision. The Committee received a Report providing details of retention, achievement and success rates for 2008/2009 and 2009/2010. It was noted that Retention for FE/HE has improved in over 75% of the Sector Subject Areas (SSAs); success rates have risen in approximately 50% of SSAs; and achievement rates have improved in approximately 70% of the SSAs.

It was also noted that there had been a significant increase in retention on all Training strands from 2008/2009 to 2009/2010 despite the current economic crisis. Retention has risen to 76%, which is ahead of the internal target, 75%. It is anticipated that achievement rates for 2009/2010 should be at least equal to those of 2008/2009.

The Committee noted marked improvement in rates for Economic Engagement and Entitlement Framework courses.

The Committee considered it important to share data in relation to retention, success and achievement rates with all members of staff. It was also crucial to provide this information in clear, explicit terms to Members of the Governing Body.

The Chairperson questioned what action was being taken in regard to under-performing teams. She was assured that strenuous efforts were being made to embed good practice throughout the College.

f) Education Committee Action Plan 2010/2011. The Committee considered and agreed a revised Action Plan for 2010/2011.

30.13 Monthly Management Accounts

The Governing Body received the Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 30 November 2010, indicating that the College has a surplus of £17k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £332k, which is £302k better than budget. The bank balance at 30 November was £3 million.

The Director of Finance informed the Governing Body that she and the Director would meet with budget holders and line managers over the next few weeks to discuss budgetary positions at the half-year stage.

30.14 Any Other Notified Business

There was no other notified business.

30.15 Date of the Next Meeting

The Chairman reminded Governors that:

a) **A Reserved Strategic Planning Workshop** has been arranged at the Farm Lodge Ballymena Campus on Tuesday 1 February 2011 commencing at 2.00 pm (sandwiches will be served prior to the Workshop at 1.30pm);

b) The Workshop will be followed by a meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee at 5.30 pm; and

c) The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for 5.30 pm Wednesday 9 March 2011 at the **Magherafelt Campus**.