

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

GOVERNING BODY

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 17 October 2007 at the Ballymoney Campus, Northern Regional College.

Present Professor W Clarke (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director), Mr S Davidson, Ms J Fullerton, Alderman P J McAvoy, Mr P McCudden, Mrs L Wallis

In Attendance Mrs B Crotty, Mr A Hall, Dr S Hanna, Mr I Houston, Mrs C Moore, Mr JA Hunter

UNRESERVED BUSINESS

4.1 College DVD

Prior to the meeting Members of the Governing Body had an opportunity to view the DVD used at the multi-centre launch of the Northern Regional College on 27 September 2007. Members congratulated the Director on an excellent presentation.

4.2 Chair of Governing Body

The Director informed Members that DEL had appointed Professor Bill Clarke as temporary Chairperson of the Governing Body until a permanent Chairperson is appointed.

Professor Clarke was invited to take the Chair

4.3 Membership of Governing Body

The Chair reported that DEL had appointed the Director as a Member of the Governing Body. He also reported that DEL had appointed the Director as the College Accounting Officer.

4.4 Apologies

Apologies were received from Ms A M Campbell, Mrs K Collins and Ms A Rankin.

4.5 Declaration of Interests

There were no declaration of interests

4.6 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 3 September 2007 were approved.

4.7 Matters Arising

4.7.1 Industrial Action (minute 3.11.1)

The Director informed the Governing Body that DEL had recruited a former senior civil servant, Sir Joseph Pilling, to chair a new set of negotiations in order to facilitate an agreement to the dispute. College employers have been requested and have confirmed that they fully support the engagement of Sir Joseph Pilling to act as an

independent adviser and they have also confirmed that his terms of reference are acceptable. The union side has also agreed to enter the negotiations but has not suspended the current industrial action in its entirety.

The Director informed the Governing Body that Sir Joseph Pilling has already visited one of the Colleges. In the meantime Directors have been charged to demonstrate efficiencies and savings with a view to accommodating an improved pay award to staff.

The Director provided details of the steps that the College had taken to ameliorate the effects of the industrial action so as to minimise potential disruption and avoid any disadvantage to students. He said that this had placed extra pressure on managers and support staff and in some instances had led to extra costs being incurred.

The Director drew attention to a copy of a draft letter to staff, which had been discussed at a recent meeting of College Chairs; the letter indicates that lecturers, in taking part in industrial action, are in breach of their contract of employment in that essential work is not being carried out. The letter also provides details of possible steps, which may have to be taken by Colleges. The Director advised that it was not intended to circulate the letter to staff during the Pilling negotiations but the College may have to return to it if there is no resolution to the dispute.

4.7.2 Staff Membership of the Governing Body

The Director reported that all members of staff had been informed of vacancies for two permanent members of staff (one teaching and one non-teaching) on the Governing Body. Nominations have been requested by 12 noon on 26 October 2007. In the event of a contest a ballot will be held. The results will be known before the next meeting of the Governing Body on 28 November 2007.

The Director indicated that discussions were taking place with NUS/USI regarding student representation on the Governing Body. It has been suggested that the Student President would be the most appropriate representative but it will be necessary for a Students' Union to be formed before the Student President can be elected.

4.8 Chairperson's Communications

There were no communications.

4.9 Director's Report

The Director highlighted the following topics from his Report:

a) NRC Launch. The official launch of the NRC had taken place simultaneously at ten separate locations on 27 October 2007. Members, who had attended the launch, commented on the success of the event, which had involved both students and staff. The Governing Body **requested the Director** to forward its congratulations to all members of staff, who had been involved in the organisation of the launch.

b) Workforce Development Forum. The third meeting of the Northern Regional Workforce Development Forum was held on 4 October 2007. Members noted that it would be important for the WDFs to establish close working relationships with the Sector Skills Councils. Members of the Governing Body, who had close contacts with the Construction and the Retail Skills Councils, offered their assistance.

c) Lifelong Learning UK. The Director has become a member of the Lifelong Learning UK Panel, which had its first meeting on 20 September 2007.

d) Graduation. Two Higher Education Graduation ceremonies will be held for students graduating from the former East Antrim Institute and the North East Institute at Galgorm Manor on 26 October 2007. The former Causeway Institute will hold its ceremony at the University of Ulster, Coleraine on 13 December 2007. Further Education Awards ceremonies will be held in Newtownabbey on 19 October 2007 and in Coleraine on 11 December 2007.

e) Junior Golf Academy. NRC is a partner in the Junior Golf Academy, which was launched at Greenmount on 13 September 2007.

f) Pre-Launch of NRC/Michelin Training Partnership. The Minister for Employment and Learning, Sir Reg Empey, has accepted the College's invitation to re-launch the partnership with Michelin on 19 December 2007.

g) UTV/Business Eye Awards. The training partnership between the College and Ryobi Aluminium Casting Ltd has been short-listed for the UTV/Business Eye Awards.

4.10 Correspondence

The Governing Body noted the following correspondence received from DEL:

a) Letter highlighting a number of issues including:

(1) Audit Committees. It is the Department's intention to provide formal training for audit committee members. The Audit Code includes a requirement that a Departmental representative should attend audit meetings as an observer; Mr R Monds has attended the first meeting of the Audit Committee in this capacity. It has also been suggested that it may be useful for the Chairs of the newly elected Audit Committees to establish an Audit Forum in the sector to share views, experiences, concerns and issues.

(2) DAO Letters. The Department of Finance and Personnel's Accountability and Accountancy Services Division is responsible, in Northern Ireland, for the production of various edicts on public sector issues, including Dear Accounting Officer and Dear Finance Officer letters. It has been suggested that it may be useful for Governing Body Chairs, Audit Committee Chairs and Senior Financial Managers as well as Accounting Officers to receive these edicts. Publications can be accessed on the AASD website.

b) Letter dated 10 October 2007 providing details of issues raised by the Appointed Auditors as a result of the Internal Audit Reports 2005/2006 received from Further Education Colleges. The Governing Body **agreed** that this correspondence should be referred to the next meeting of the Audit Committee.

c) Letter dated 11 September 2007 detailing the Department's policy for the approval of non-National Qualifications Framework (NQF) qualifications. The circular sets out the criteria to be followed by FE Colleges, who wish to submit non-NQF qualifications for approval by the Department and inclusion on a new Prescribed List of Approved Qualifications (PLAQ).

d) Letter indicating that the Comptroller and Auditor General of the Northern Ireland Audit Office will assume responsibility for the external audit of the Further Education sector. The Director advised that, as there is currently no legislative requirement for the Comptroller and Auditor General to undertake College audit services, it would be necessary for the Governing Body to invite the Audit Office to perform these duties for 2007/2008 and until such time as legislation makes it compulsory. The Governing Body **agreed** that the Director should invite the Audit Office to assume responsibility for the external audit of the College.

4.11 Audit Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 2 October 2007.

It was noted that the Committee had scrutinised tender proposals from eight providers, who wish to be considered for the appointment of Internal Auditors to the College, and had agreed that all eight providers should be invited to make a presentation to the Interview Panel. It was further noted that the Committee had agreed that the Panel should consist of three members of the Audit Committee (Mrs A M Campbell, Mrs K Collins and Alderman P J McAvoy), the Accounting Officer, The Heads of Corporate Services and a Finance representative (in attendance only).

The Director advised the Governing Body that it had not been possible to find a suitable date for the interviews, which would suit the three Members of the Governing Body on the Panel. In discussions with the Chair of the Audit Committee it had been recommended that the Audit Committee should reconvene with a view to examining an alternative short-listing procedure, which would entail a paper evaluation of the eight providers leading to a short-list of two firms, which would be invited for interview. The Governing Body **agreed** that the Audit Committee should reconvene to consider and approve an alternative short-listing procedure.

4.12 College Development Plan

a) FE Funding Model. Mrs Crotty provided a presentation regarding the FE Funding Model. She advised Members that the new Model involved a change from retrospective funding (SPURS) to "in year" funding through Funded Learning Units (FLUs). She stated that FLUs applied to all full-time and part-time Further Education enrolments including Essential Skills. She provided Members with details of FLU Funding limitations and weightings and the key dates for DEL funding, which would be based on student retention.

b) Enrolments 2007/2008. In presenting his paper Mr Houston stated that full-time enrolments for 2007/2008 had fallen short of targets at Levels 1, 2 and 3 but there had been an increase in the six Priority Skills. It was noted that in recent years enrolments in Engineering and Catering and Hospitality had been declining whereas Built Environment, Sport, Travel, Hair and Beauty and Child Care had shown growth.

Mr Houston indicated that there had been an overall increase in full-time enrolments in Ballymoney/Coleraine and Newtownabbey/Felden/Larne but a decline in Antrim/Ballymena/Magherafelt.

It was noted that several factors such as demographic change, increased competition from schools and factors such as the state of the economy and career prospects had contributed to the variations in enrolments.

During discussion the rationalisation of courses and the viability of campuses were raised. It was noted that delivery of courses need not be on-campus but offered in conjunction with partners.

c) College Development Plan.

The Governing Body received the College Development Plan Phase II, which had been prepared by Dr S Hanna. Dr Hanna advised Members that the Temporary Executive Committee had received and approved the CDP Phase I at its meeting on 16 May 2007. Following submission of the CDP to the Department, representatives from the College had met DEL officials to discuss the document on 29 May 2007. The Department had accepted the "realistic and robust targets" included in the CDP.

Dr Hanna stated that CDP Phase II was a series of answers to questions posed by the Department rather than a plan. He said that these questions had been posed to ensure that Colleges were addressing issues highlighted in "FE Means Business".

During discussion several comments were made in relation to the CDP including:

- a) Section 2.3 Initiatives. The Director drew attention to the many initiatives aimed at increasing collaboration with other institutions, organisations and groups.
- b) Section 2.4 Representation. The Governing Body welcomed the scope and breadth of the College's representation on outside bodies.
- c) Annex B. Concern was expressed that the Income and Expenditure Accounts forecast an historic cost deficit of £600k in 2007/2008 and further deficits of £1.6 million and £2.6 million in the following two years. The Director stated that the Governing Body will need to consider these deficits not in isolation but in the context of curriculum, staffing and estates.
- d) Section 11.3 Performance Management. The Governing Body noted the numerous areas that it would be required to monitor on a routine basis.
- e) Section 11.5 Planning Process. Dr Hanna stated that a planning model and associated planning cycle and calendar are being developed for the College in 2007/2008. Considerable emphasis is being placed on developing ownership of the planning process at all levels from Governors to staff. The Director advised that the Governing Body would receive a set of objectives and targets for consideration at its next meeting

The Governing Body congratulated Dr Hanna for his meticulous preparation of a comprehensive and complex document. The Governing Body **agreed that the CDP Phase II be approved** for submission to the Department by 26 October 2007.

4.13 Complaints Policy

The Governing Body noted that the College is currently implementing a Complaints Policy in accordance with the structures of its three constituent institutions. The Director stated that this Policy would be adjusted once the new management structure is in place. **In endorsing the Complaints Policy the Governing Body agreed that it is important for the College to have a policy in place** to enable it to deal with any complaints that may arise.

4.14 Staffing Issues

The Governing Body received a paper concerning staffing issues and noted:

- a) One new Permanent Appointment (approved by the Chair of Staffing Committee or Chair of the Governing Body);
- b) Twenty-four Temporary Appointments (approved by the Director/ Deputy Director prior to appointment);
- c) Six Permanent Associate Lecturers (gained through service as part-time lecturers);
- d) Seven Resignations;
- e) Two End of Temporary Contracts;
- f) One Retirement.

The Governing Body also **approved an application for a career break** in respect of a member of staff.

4.15 Any Other Business

a) Travel Expenses

It was **agreed** that Members of the Governing Body should have their travelling expenses paid by the system in operation at Newtownabbey. It was also **agreed** that the Head of Corporate Services, Newtownabbey should seek details of Members' bank accounts to facilitate the direct payment of expenses.

b) Electronic Copies of Agendas and Papers.

The Governing Body noted that a suggestion had been received to the effect that Members in future should receive an electronic copy of agendas and papers rather than hard copies. It was noted, however, that not every Member had access to computers and that hard copies would still be required.

The Governing Body **agreed** that:

(a) The Secretary should conduct a pilot project and distribute papers electronically for the next meeting of the Governing Body to all members with computers (hard copies would be distributed to members, who had no means of receiving electronic transmissions);

(b) The Director should approach the Learning and Skills Development Agency (LSDA) to ascertain if the College could still participate in their e-governance pilot project.

c) Meetings of Committees of the Governing Body

The Governing Body noted that meetings of the Committees of the Governing Body are scheduled as follows:

Audit Committee, 5 pm Tuesday 20 November 2007 at Antrim Campus. It was noted that it might be necessary to convene this meeting at an earlier date to consider the appointment of Internal Auditors;

Finance & General Purposes Committee, 5.30 pm Thursday 13 December 2007 at Café Lamont, Ballymena Campus;

Staffing Committee, 7.00 pm Thursday 13 December 2007 at Café Lamont, Ballymena Campus.

d) Next Meeting of Governing Body

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 28 November 2007 at the Newtownabbey Campus at 6.30 pm. The first meeting in the New Year will be held at 6.30 pm on Wednesday 16 January 2008 at the Antrim Campus. It was noted that a Special Meeting of the Governing Body would be required on Wednesday 24 November 2007 to ratify the recommendations of the Appointment Panels for second-tier appointments.