

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **GOVERNING BODY**

Minutes of the meeting of the Governing Body held on 5 March 2008 at the Antrim Campus, Northern Regional College

Present Professor W Clarke (Chairperson), Mr T Neilands (Director),  
Mrs A M Campbell, Mrs K Collins, Ms J Fullerton, Mr A Henderson,  
Alderman P J McAvoy, Mr P McCudden, Ms C O'Neill, Ms A Rankin,  
Mrs L Wallis, Mr A Watt

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

### **UNRESERVED BUSINESS**

#### **7.1 Membership of Governing Body**

The Chairperson welcomed the following new Members:

- a) Ms Clare O'Neill, member of non-teaching staff elected by the non-teaching staff to the Governing Body;
- b) Mr Andrew Watt, member of the teaching staff elected by the teaching staff to the Governing Body;
- c) Mr Alan Henderson, President of the Students' Union and student representative on the Governing Body.

The Governing Body noted that the Department had informed the Members concerned that their periods of appointment commenced on 26 February 2008.

#### **7.2 Apologies**

An apology was received from Mr S Davidson.

#### **7.3 Declaration of Interests**

There were no declarations of interests.

#### **7.4 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the last meeting of the Governing Body held on 16 January 2008 were approved

#### **7.5 Matters Arising**

##### **7.5.1 Industrial Action (minute 6.4.2)**

The Director advised the Governing Body that negotiations had now reached a critical stage. The results of the Union ballot had indicated that the majority of UCU members were not in favour of the deal negotiated by Sir Joseph Pilling; NASUWT, however, voted in favour of the deal. It was noted that UCU is seeking a fresh mandate for industrial action.

The Director informed the Committee that the Chairpersons of Governing Bodies and College Directors had met with the Minister, Sir Reg Empey, to discuss the situation. The Minister had stated that there was nothing else he could do to resolve the dispute.

It was agreed, at the meeting, that decisive action should be taken to prevent the dispute continuing into the forthcoming academic year. It was further agreed that a letter should be circulated to staff of all six colleges to give them an understanding of the situation from the employer perspective. The letter was forwarded to staff of the Northern Regional College on 29 February 2008. The Director explained that he was holding briefing sessions on 6 and 7 March as a follow-up to the letter.

The Chairperson stated that Directors and Chairpersons of Governing Bodies would meet soon after the results of the forthcoming UCU ballot are known. If the ballot indicates a prolongation of industrial action then it will be necessary to take decisive action to protect the student body.

#### 7.5.2 Key Strategic Priorities (minute 6.11)

The Director advised the Governing Body that he intended to circulate the draft Key Strategic Priorities and the Draft Mission Statement to Members for comment, using the secure section for NRC Governors on the Teaching & Learning Communities (TLC) web site.

**The Governing Body endorsed the proposed method for obtaining comments from Members in relation to these documents. It also agreed that the new members of the Governing Body should receive training in regard to access to the TLC website.**

#### 7.6 Chairperson's Communications

The Chairman had no communications

#### 7.7 Director's Report

The Director drew attention to the following topics:

a) INTEREG Funding. The Director announced that the College, in collaboration with Sligo College of Technology and Ayr College, had been successful in their bid for Knowledge and Innovation Transfer in Engineering (KITE) funding and had been awarded €3.9 million. He added that there would be a high profile launch in respect of the project. The Governing Body congratulated Ms Clare O'Neill on her input to the application for funding;

b) Welfare Development Forum. The Forum had identified a need for maintenance engineering in the area and a two-year Adult Apprentice Training Programme for personnel from local firms would be introduced in September;

c) Training for Success. The Director informed the Governing Body that the contract DEL had offered to a UK Training Consortium in respect of Motor Vehicle Training had been withdrawn and bids would now be accepted and the contract would now be passed to the six colleges;

d) Strategic Positioning. The Director stated that he had met six local MLAs with a view to establishing communication channels and to apprising them of the work of the College.

## 7.8 Internal Communications Programme

The Governing Body received a paper concerning internal communications prepared by Dr Hanna. He stated that the large geographical spread of the College and the large number of staff made internal communications difficult. He produced a summary of a recent Internal Communications Audit, compiled from the results of a Staff Questionnaire, comments from Focus Groups and Staff representatives and observations from Inspectorate reports. The Audit highlighted a number of communication weaknesses but revealed a high level of satisfaction in relation to communication between line managers and their staff.

Dr Hanna stressed that it was important to develop and implement a coherent and effective internal communications programme. He said that good internal communications would bring benefits to the College and help to maximise levels of staff satisfaction, morale and engagement.

Dr Hanna drew Members' attention to the action plan he had prepared for implementing the internal communications programme. He advised the Governing Body that it would be necessary, as part of the implementation process, to identify barriers to good communications.

During discussion reference was made to a number of issues including; the need for consideration to be given to Governing Body involvement in the communication process; the nature of information to be communicated to staff; the benefits deriving from corporate briefings; and to the possibility of an annual staff conference

### **The Governing Body agreed that:**

- a) Dr Hanna should proceed with his efforts to improve communications within the College and to bring a more detailed action plan, which would have regard to Members' observations, to a future meeting;
- b) The Director should provide staff with a summary of the recent Internal Communications Audit.

## 7.9 Correspondence

The Governing Body received a copy of the Tenure of Office section of the revised Instrument of Government. It noted minor changes at sections 1b and 1c relating the duration of tenure of members of the Governing Body.

## 7.10 Minutes of the Audit Committee

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee held on 26 February 2008. Attention was drawn to the:

- a) Three-Year Strategic Audit Plan, which provides details of the internal audit programme for the three-year period 2007/2008 to 2009/2010. In presenting the Plan, the Internal Auditors stressed the need for the completion of college-wide and associated areas Risk Registers.

A Member expressed concern that no mention of "Student Recruitment and Retention" was made in the Audit Plan. It was suggested that this issue would be covered under "Fees and Enrolments". **It was agreed that the Internal Auditors should be asked to reassess this matter.**

In response to a query as to why the Payroll Review should be delayed until 2008/2009 the Director of Finance advised that the Review had been arranged for 2008/2009 as a new payroll system was being introduced in 2007/2008.

b) Audit Committee Annual Reports in respect of the College's three predecessor institutions: Causeway Institute, East Antrim Institute and North East Institute. Having reviewed the annual accounts of the predecessor institutions and reports from both their internal and external auditors, the Audit Committee expressed its satisfaction, as far as can be ascertained from these sources, with the assurance of control systems of the former institutes.

**The Governing Body endorsed the Three-Year Audit Plan 2007/2008 to 2009/2010 and agreed that the Audit Committee Annual Reports from the three constituent institutes be approved and forwarded to the Department.**

#### **7.11 Minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee**

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Finance and General Purposes Committee held on 26 February 2008.

The Governing Body noted that:

a) The Director and Chairperson of the Governing Body had met with DEL representatives and had discussed, inter alia, the College's financial performance. The Department had recognised that the NRC is the weakest of the colleges in the sector in terms of financial reserves, a fact that would be taken into consideration when funds are being allocated for redundancy costs;

b) The Committee had approved Key Performance Indicators, which had been developed to measure the College's current position against excellence. A Member observed that the KPIs were finance orientated. She was assured that other areas of the College would be included in the framework and that Deputy Directors were already giving consideration to this matter.

c) Circular FE 03/08, which sets out a summary of College Accounts for the sector for the year ended 31 July 2008. The Director drew attention to the Diversity of Income ratio (DEL grants only), which stands at 26.71% placing the College in the middle of the sector. When DEL grants, Jobskills and other Departmental funding are taken into consideration the Diversity of Income falls to 10.14%, the lowest in the sector. The Director stated that the College had to become less dependent on DEL funding and generate more external funds;

d) The Monthly Management Accounts for the period up to 31 December 2007, which show a surplus of £176k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £738k (£144k ahead of budget);

e) The Schedule of Financial Returns to DEL.

#### **7.12 Monthly Management Accounts**

The Governing Body noted the satisfactory situation in relation to the Monthly Management Accounts for the half-year up to 31 January 2008. The Accounts show a deficit of £102k on continuing operations and an historic surplus of £572k (£224k ahead of budget). The Cash at Bank position, £7,331k, is strong.

**The Governing Body agreed that the Monthly Management Accounts should be approved and forwarded as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarterly Return to DEL.**

#### **7.13 Staffing Committee**

The Governing Body received the minutes of the meeting of the Staffing Committee held on 20 February 2008.

The Governing Body noted that:

a) Absenteeism at the three constituent institutes was favourable in 2006/2007, when compared with the previous years and with the sector as a whole. The Committee agreed that approval be granted to a request from DEL to publish identifiable absence statistics in respect of the College in its annual statistical survey of the sector.

b) Interviews for third-tier appointments are scheduled for the weeks before and after the Easter break.

#### **7.14 Students' Union Constitution**

The Governing Body received a copy of the Students' Union Constitution, which had been assembled by Mr J Pillar (Student Services, Ballymena Campus) in association with his colleagues in Student Services at Coleraine and Newtownabbey.

Comments were made regarding a number of sections of the Constitution. It was noted with concern that there was provision for three Student Presidents based at the Coleraine, Ballymena and Newtownabbey campuses. It was stressed that this would be an interim arrangement. Concern was also expressed in regard to the size of the Student Council, which would include the Executive Committee and class representatives from all sites. Observations were made regarding the level of indemnity in respect of student officers and a query was raised as to whether the Union should appoint a Welfare Officer in addition to Equal Opportunities and Disabilities Officers.

**The Governing Body agreed that the Chairperson should meet with the Deputy Director of Support and Development to address these issues and report back to a future meeting.**

#### **7.15 Any Other Business**

##### **7.15.1 Documents for New Members**

In response to a query **it was agreed to circulate appropriate documents such as the Financial Memorandum, the Instrument of Government and the Articles of Government to new Members of the Governing Body.**

##### **7.15.2 Next Meeting**

**The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Wednesday 16 April 2008 at 6.30 pm at the Ballymena Campus.**