

Northern Regional College

Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 6 May 2020 by Skype commencing at 5:05pm

Present: Dr D Lennox (Chair), Mr R Cochrane, Ms A Dynes, Mrs G McConnell, Mr T Montgomery and Professor T Scott

In Attendance: Mr A Ballantyne, Dr L Firth, Ms H Hampsey, Mr M Higgins, Mr B McGahan, Ms A Morrison, Mr P O'Neill, Mr D Russell, Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

47.1 Apologies and Welcome

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, especially Mr Montgomery who had been recently appointed to the Governing Body and had joined the Education Committee. He also welcomed Mr McGahan who had joined the meeting. He also thanked Mrs McConnell who had agreed to join Committee in a temporary capacity.

Apologies were received for Mr Hutchinson.

47.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

47.3 Communications

Members noted that Mr Montgomery had agreed to join the Education Committee.

47.4 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meetings held on 16 March 2020 were approved subject a change to the wording on page 2, para 3 to "...a member of staff was self-isolating".

Proposer: Ms Dynes Seconder: Mr Cochrane

47.5 Matters Arising

None.

It was agreed to reorder the agenda.

47.10 Entrepreneurship Hub Action Plan

Mrs Morrison took members through the Entrepreneurship Hub report which had been previously circulated. She reported that it had been hoped to have all actions with a RAG rating of green, however, the impact of Covid-19 had resulted in three actions being temporarily put on hold. Members noted, however, that progress was planned on these in the

coming months including hosting an annual Entrepreneurship conference in the coming year, with all-college participation.

In terms of sector input, Mrs Morrison advised full engagement by all colleges. In relation to funding, advice from the Department was that whilst no decisions would be made in the current situation, the funding timeline could be extended beyond the 2-year agreement if needed.

Members thanked Mrs Morrison for her presentation and noted the 6-monthly report.

5.22pm Mrs Morrison left the meeting.

47.6 Teaching & Learning Committee

Committee noted the minutes of the T&L meeting on 24 April 2020.

Prof Scott reported that whilst no further information on calculated grades had been received from the NI Regulator, the College had been working to ensure speedy action once the position was confirmed. College campuses had been opened as necessary to allow staff access to required materials and documentation.

47.7 Teaching and Learner Adviser (TLA) Action Plan Report

Dr Firth spoke to the TLA Action Plan report, previously circulated. She advised members that annual performance review sessions highlighted areas where lesson observations were prioritised. Mr O'Neill highlighted an emphasis on building skills and capabilities of TLAs and using to support lecturer and peer groups in mentoring and evaluation roles. The importance of ensuring that interventions by the TLAs was improving outcomes was noted by members.

47.8 Essential Skills Action Plan Report

Ms Hampsey spoke to her report on the Essential Skills Action Plan and highlighted that all objectives were seeing positive effects. Members were advised that the majority of actions would be green by the end of June, with some having 'stalled' due to timing issues around Covid-19.

Ms Hampsey thanked HODs for their assistance in setting up of a Task and Finish group to support ownership of actions and noted input from the Exams Manager in exams preparation.

The Chair commended Ms Hampsey for progress made on actions in an area which had previously given cause for concern.

47.9 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) Status Report

Ms Hagan presented an overview of the QIP, drawing attention to amber rated actions and detailing work under way to progress same.

The Chair noted the extensive work being undertaken in preparation for a return to campus in September, especially in the light of uncertainty around course offering and social distancing requirements.

Mr O'Neill highlighted the increased challenge for FE colleges, as opposed to other educational establishments, especially in relation to the requirement for virtual learning provision. Members noted that Ms Small would be working to identify courses which could be delivered totally online and Prof Scott advised that a strategy focused on upskilling adults who had lost jobs would be brought to GB at a future date.

6.05pm Ms Hagan left the meeting.

47.11 COVID-19 Update

This update report was taken as read. Mr O'Neill noted a number of key issues including difficulties experienced by students undertaking remote learning; concerns around lack of clarity from awarding organisations and risks posed to achievement rates dependent on the timely receipt of detailed guidelines. Mr O'Neill highlighted work being done on preparation for teaching/assessment on courses that cannot be taught remotely and to address retention and recruitment of students. In respect of assessment of student apprenticeship courses, criteria for health & safety requirement or licence would likely result in delay to awards.

Members noted that the potential for reduced admission numbers in the next academic year was a sector-wide concern.

47.12 Course Provision for September 2020

HODs presented Departmental overviews of the status for the course offerings for next academic year, together with anticipated numbers of enrolments.

Care and Access (CAT). Ms Hampsey reported that numbers remained stable and additionality offered to students was being reviewed.

Engineering and Built Environment (EBE). Mr Russell advised that EBE was focusing attention on strength of provision and seeking to position as the college of choice, particularly for carpentry and joinery.

Science and Service Industries (SSI). Mr Ballantyne reported that the course offering remained stable. He noted the HLA in Supply Chain and Logistics course had been developed in response to the needs of local industry.

Members were advised that for each new proposed course, approval had been sought from respective awarding bodies.

Mr O'Neill presented Report Card 1 (RC1) at 31 March 2020 and highlighted target differentials due to Covid-19 situation. He noted that student online engagement levels were at 83% at the beginning of lockdown. Numbers had reduced and subsequently picked up after Easter, however, with students participating on a number of different online platforms.

ACTION: A summary of new courses endorsed by SLT, with requisite approvals and clear progression pathways, would be drawn up for the next Education Committee meeting.

Committee noted the College Development Plan (CDP) for 2020/21 would be updated to reflect the impact from Covid-19 before submission to the Department in June 2020.

47.13 Student President Update

This report was taken as read. Committee noted that the Student President had taken part in a radio interview discussion on results of the Student Safety Net survey, to which NRC students had submitted the greatest number of responses. Members noted that Mr Cochrane had proven an excellent ambassador for the College.

Mr Cochrane also noted the good level of communication from the College during the Covid-19 pandemic.

47.14 Task and Finish Groups

Members noted reports from the Traineeship, Calculated Grades and Admissions Task and Finish Working Groups which had been set up to ensure cross-College team working and assurance to Committee on the College's preparedness to respond once guidance is issued by regulators.

Prof Scott outlined the regulatory structure in Northern Ireland and resulting difficulties in relation to timing of information provision coming from OFQUAL (English regulator) and from the NI regulator (CCEA).

47.15 Student Communications

The report of the Student Working Group was noted. Members noted feedback from students about the communications issued during the pandemic had been very positive.

47.16 Any Other Business

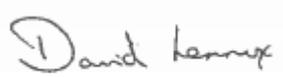
None.

47.17 Date of next meeting

It was agreed that a meeting be held week commencing 7 June to scrutinise course information, prior to presentation to the Governing Body on 17 June.

ACTION: The Secretary would survey members and confirm a date for the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 7.11pm.

David Lennox: 

Date: 10 June 2020

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace: 

(Secretary)