

Northern Regional College

Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 10 June 2020 by Skype commencing at 5:03pm

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)

48.1 Apologies

Apologies were received from Mr Hutchinson.

48.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

48.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 6 May 2020 were approved subject to noting that Mr McGahan had been 'in attendance' at the meeting. The draft minutes would be amended to reflect this change.

Proposer: Ms Dynes Seconder: Mrs McConnell

48.4 Matters Arising

None.

48.5 Chair's Communication / Correspondence

Referring to recent media coverage Prof Scott advised that representatives from the Principals' Group had met with the Economy Committee with an agreed presentation on the response of Colleges to the Covid-19 pandemic. The presentation highlighted a 25% reduction in course recruitment for NRC but the 40% reported in the media was the figure for Belfast Met. Following the presentation, the Minister requested a meeting with Principals along with her Special Adviser to get an update on urgent issues in relation to sector. The Principals undertook to forward a briefing paper to the Minister.

5.15pm Mr Cochrane joined the meeting.

Members noted the comprehensive efforts being made by staff to achieve submission deadlines required by awarding organisations. In response to a question, Prof Scott outlined contact and communication being carried out to support staff and student health and wellbeing whilst working remotely.

The Chair noted the reassurance provided by senior management during this difficult period and asked that a watching brief be kept on these issues.

48.6 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP)

Ms Small spoke to her presentation on the development and progress of a whole-College QIP tracker to track timelines and facilitate monitoring of progress against actions. Members noted that the app had now been launched and were provided with an insight into the capacity of the interactive, responsive, dashboard style reporting.

Ms Small advised that a demonstration of the app would be presented at the Governing Body meeting on 30 June. Members noted that future reviews of progress of the QIP would be aligned to Committee meeting dates.

ACTION: Ms Small to provide an update paper in advance of the Governing Body meeting.

The Chair voiced his appreciation for work carried out on this project.

48.7 Timeframe for College Development Plan (CDP)

Ms Small reported that the submission date for the CDP had been extended to 31 August. A template reporting document from the Department was expected in the coming week.

48.8 Course Provision

Ms Small presented proposals submitted to the Department for provision of online courses in response to Covid-19. She reported that a response had been received during the meeting, approving all courses (with the exception of World Host as this was not part of their priority list) and associated funding requirements. Members noted the prerequisite for courses to be completed online by the end of November and to result in an accredited qualification.

Ms Small highlighted current approval status of the various courses, all of which would be ready for delivery in September 2020 via Canvas. Consideration was currently being given to the online platform for provision of live class engagements and cohort numbers would be maintained between 12-20 students.

Committee noted the report and wished Ms Small well on progress with online provision.

48.9 Approval of Courses

Mr O'Neill gave an overview of planned course provision for the 20/21 year and work involved in getting to this point. He paid tribute to the teamwork and time committed by staff in reviewing and developing the portfolio of new courses.

The Heads of Department (HODs) for Care, Access and Technology (CAT); Engineering and Built Environment (EBE); and Science and Service Industries (SSI); updated members on course provision for their Departments and noted key issues including transfer from City & Guilds to Pearson for level 2 C&A; industry led demand in EBE and SSI; and the move to RQF qualification for revised course provision.

In response to a query from Mr Montgomery, Mr O'Neill and Prof Scott outlined issues which contribute to a final decision on course viability including progression pathways, 'A' level and GCSE results, class size and, currently, impact of Covid-19 requirements especially in regards to social distancing. Members noted that a reduction to a social distancing requirement of 1m would enable the College to mostly work with the numbers shown on the schedule of course provision. Prof Scott advised that the College adhered closely to course proposals and that focus for the current year would be on returning students, with the continuation of blended provision.

In response to the Chair's query on stress testing the capacity for increased course provision, members noted that this was part of the curriculum strategy to provide upskilling, blended learning and part-time courses. Provision of courses through additionality, to provide value added was noted along with courses developed in response to anticipated demand.

Prof Scott affirmed that, in future and as part of the overall governance structure, proposals for courses would be notified to Committee whilst in planning stage, i.e. pre-approval.

Members noted that assurance of appropriate authorisation having been sought from awarding bodies, had been provided. Committee approved the schedule of course provision update.

The Chair thanked the HODs and Mr O'Neill for work undertaken to get to the current stage.

48.10 Calculated Grades App

Mr O'Neill outlined pressures on the College arising from demands levied by the large number of awarding organisations and the requirements of two FE Regulators. He summarised actions taken by the Task and Finish group and the resultant development of an app monitoring tool as a digital response to paper based requirements. Mr O'Neill noted the value of the app as the key tool in supporting the Senior Leadership Team to stand over decisions and quality assurance processes.

Dr Firth took members through the presentation slides showing summary information generated by the app. She highlighted the extensive benefits and spoke on the potential to embed the app in College operations as a management tool.

Members were advised of the workload currently entailed in entering data into spreadsheets and the expectation for the coming year that the app and the LMS system would be able to 'talk' to each other.

Committee commended staff on the extensive work undertaken to date and asked that HODs pass appreciation to their teams. The Chair also endorsed Prof Scott's acknowledgements of staff in her weekly message to staff.

48.11 Any Other Business

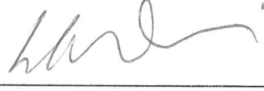
The Chair noted that this would be his last Committee meeting and put on record his thanks to members, SLT and staff who have interfaced with the Committee, for their work, assistance and support. He considered it a pleasure to have been on the Education Committee and gain an insight into the work being carried out.

Prof Scott thanked Dr Lennox, on behalf of staff and other governors, for taking up the role of Education Committee Chair. She noted the extensive additional work involved as a result of additional meetings and thanked him for the support and direction provided.

48.12 Date of next meeting

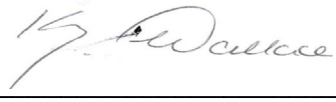
A draft schedule of meetings would be considered at the Governing Body meeting on 30 June 2020.

The meeting concluded at 6.37pm.

Mrs I Allison 

(Chair)

Date: 30.09.20

Mrs K Wallace: 

(Secretary)