

Northern Regional College

Education Committee

Minutes of the meeting of the Education Committee held on 16 March 2020 by conference call, commencing at 5:00pm.

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

In Attendance: Mr A Ballantyne (46.11), Mrs M Donnelly, Ms H Hampsey (46.11), Mrs D Kerr (46.11), Mr P O'Neill, Mr D Russell (46.11), Ms J Small and Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

46.1 Apologies

Mr Hutchinson and Mrs McConnell noted as apologies. The Chair thanked members and staff for participating in a conference call at short notice due to the fast emerging Covid-19 emergency. He also advised that a number of agenda items would be deferred as staff were heavily engaged in responding to the emergency situation.

46.2 Declaration of Interests

None.

46.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 February 2020 were approved.

46.4 Matters Arising

Mr O'Neill advised that, having completed first line training with the new Safeguarding governor, Safeguarding Officers were now engaging with the Department of Education to identify further available training.

46.7 Business Continuity Plan / Covid-19

Prof Scott reported on the activity of the Business Continuity Team in response to the Covid-19 pandemic and which would be holding daily meetings going forward. Members noted information on actions being taken to restrict student attendance in the current week by other colleges in the sector. Absence of guidance from the Department and a lack of joined-up communication between DE and DfE regarding FE colleagues was noted.

Mr O'Neill outlined preparations to resource and enable staff to work from home including provision of laptops and access checking of services and NRC links. Prof Scott advised that information was being circulated to staff and students online and by email on a daily basis. Mr Ballantyne reported that preparations to provide lessons online were ongoing.

The potential for halting face-to-face lectures for special needs students would be given further consideration mid-week. Arrangements for social distancing and issues in relation to placement for L3, 4 and 5 students would be considered at the GB meeting.

Prof Scott advised that financial scenario planning on a 1 and 2 month basis had been carried out and the Department had been alerted to the possibility of significant additional costs. Committee noted that arrangements had been put in place to ensure payments to staff and students.

Ms Dynes advised that the issue desk in Coleraine library had been temporarily closed after a member of staff was self-isolating. She noted that people were becoming more aware of the issues and the daily advice being provided by the College was appreciated. Mr Cochrane echoed these comments from a student perspective. A presentation would be tabled at the GB meeting covering the College's business continuity plan and information provided to staff on addressing anxiety concerns. The Chair thanked all of the staff involved in the planning process in what was an emerging and uncertain situation.

Prof Scott outlined a number of risks that had been changed following review of the Risk Register on 31 January. She advised on actions taken by IT Assist to address IT issues faced at the College Open Day, which had been caused by a high volume of activity. Committee were supportive of the content changes to the Risk Register.

46.5 Chair's communication / Correspondence

Correspondence from the Department regarding the Curriculum Development Plan (CDP) commissioning process and progress reporting template were noted. Prof Scott reported an extension to the reporting deadline which had been agreed in an earlier phone call. The Chair thanked all staff for collaboration on this work.

46.6 Committee membership

The Chair advised that as well as acting as Safeguarding Governor, Mrs McConnell, along with Mr Hutchinson, had agreed to join the Committee until the end of the academic year when membership of Committees would be reviewed.

46.8 Student Numbers / CDP 2020/21

Mr O'Neill and Ms Kerr took members through the process for preparing the 2020/21 CDP and highlighted key themes including planning assumptions going forward, impact on projected student numbers based on current year performance. The difference between start-of-year (SOY) and end-of-year (EOY) figures was explained along with the impact of Empower (from lottery monies) on baseline.

HOD overviews of course changes were noted along with Information on MaSN numbers and funding for the coming year and environmental factors. It was noted that projections had been based on current figures pending an update on available budget from the Department. It was noted that decisions on new and withdrawn courses had been made based on assessed viability. Updates to the course portfolio would be provided in the online College prospectus.

Committee were content to approve the draft 2020/21 CDP for presentation to the GB meeting, pending developments with Covid-19.

46.9 Teaching & Learning Adviser (TLA) Action Plan Update

Deferred to a future meeting due to the need to prioritise Covid-19 preparations.

46.10 Essential Skills (ES) Action Plan Update

Deferred to a future meeting.

46.11 Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) Status Report

Deferred to a future meeting.

46.12 Entrepreneurship Hub Update

Deferred to a future meeting.

46.13 Any Other Business

Mr O'Neill reported that ETi had advised that the College inspection would commence on 27 April 2020. Preparation for the visit was in hand and would be shared at the GB meeting.

It was proposed that the GB meeting on 18 March be held onsite with the option of Skype access. However, that would be kept under review and further advice would be issued when available.

46.14 Date of next meeting

Next meeting to be held on 6 May 2020 in Farm Lodge campus.

The meeting concluded at 6.35pm.

David Lennox: 

(Chair)

Date: 06.05.20

6 May 2020

Mrs K Wallace: 

(Secretary)