

## **NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE**

### **EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**Minutes of the Education Committee meeting held on 20 September 2023 on MS Teams commencing at 4.00pm.**

**Present:** Dr P Graham (Chair), Ms J Hemphill, Mr M Higgins, Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin, Mr D Small

**In Attendance:** Mrs C Brown, Ms H Hampsey, Ms D Kerr, Mr S Laverty, Mr S McCartney, Dr L Monteith, Ms J Small, Mrs K Wallace (Secretary)

#### **63.1 Apologies/Welcome**

There were no apologies.

The Chair welcomed Mr Patterson and Mr Small as new members of Committee. He extended thanks to Mr McAllister, who had moved to the Audit & Risk Committee, for his work to date.

#### **63.2 Declarations of Interest**

For the benefit of new members, the Chair highlighted that his wife was the Head of the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI).

#### **63.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 10 May 2023 were approved.

Proposed: Mr Higgins                      Seconded: Ms Hemphill

#### **63.4 Matters Arising**

None.

#### **63.5 Chair's Communications / Correspondence**

The Chair invited nominations for the position of Education Committee Vice Chair. On the proposal of Mr Higgins and seconded by Ms Hemphill, Mr Shevlin was nominated to the position.

4.06pm Mr Shevlin and Mr McCartney joined the meeting.

Members heard that proposals were being put forward for 23/24 audits of the T&L Directorate. Mrs Brown explained that a sectoral audit of the Training Assistance Management System (TAMS) would be unfeasible at this time, therefore the audit would focus on workarounds put in place to supplement the system during its development. Other audits within T&L Directorate – of exams and admissions and enrolment processes – were noted.

Committee noted the HLA Letter of Offer 2023/24 and the T&L organisational chart.

Members heard that information on the Level 3 (L3) Evaluation carried out in March 2023 would be provided as part of the T&L Excellence report later on the agenda.

The Chair reported that he had agreed to attend a Study USA scheme graduation event on 6 October 2023 in the Harbour Commissioners. An invitation had been received from Mary Mallon, Head of Education for the British Council Northern Ireland, who is keen to get FE students involved in the scheme.

The Chair noted that a recent pre-consultation letter sent to staff relating to possible voluntary severance scheme, which had also been provided to members.

### **63.6 VP T&L Summary Report**

The report was taken as read, with interim updates on enrolment and performance to be provided later in the meeting. Mrs Brown highlighted the level of disruption from strike action currently taking place; issues arising from course oversubscription in Electrical Installation coupled with difficulties in recruiting relevant staff; and actions taken to mitigate impact. She commended senior and middle management teams for their work to manage the situation.

The Principal confirmed the challenges faced in trying to recruit appropriate staff given the pay and conditions on offer by the FE sector. He outlined actions taken following negotiations on pay with Trade Unions and, whilst respecting the staff position, expressed disappointment at the current level of industrial action taking place. In regards to the pre-consultation letter, members noted that work to assess the impact of budget constraints on the College cost base would commence over the next few weeks.

During discussion, members heard that staffing sustainability and efficiency measures were not part of the Departmental review, an update on which would be given at the GB meeting on 4 October. In relation to feedback from students on impact of the strike action, reports generated as part of the student voice would be reviewed and considered, with the first survey due to be carried out shortly.

**Action: A deep review into HE provision to take place at future Education Committee meeting**

### **63.7 College Development Plan 2022/23 Progress Report 3**

Ms Kerr summarised the contents of this report, which had been submitted to the Department in August, and explained the position on red risks.

Ms Small provided clarification on total external engagement activity, which was not reflected in the report which measured only specific elements selected by the Department.

**Action:**

- **Where a red risk appears for more than 2 consecutive meetings, to be included as an agenda item for consideration by Committee.**
- **Ms Small would provide a full update on external engagement to members following presentation at Resources Committee on 16 October.**
- **Ms Kerr would label risk colours on future reports, to aid identification on printed papers.**

**63.8 Enrolments**

The attached report was taken as read. Ms Hampsey updated on a number of changes to the enrolment position which would continue to fluctuate over the coming weeks. She reported that commencement of part time classes had been deferred for a week due to strike action, and that further classes would enrol throughout the year. The final extract of figures for the CDP would be taken on 13 October.

The Principal queried whether anything further could be done to maximise the conversion rate for applications to unique learners going forward.

**Action: Mrs Brown would have further analysis carried out on maximisation of conversion rates.**

**63.9 Teaching & Learning Excellence**

In the context of the report, Dr Monteith explained the reason for requesting a meeting with ETI following the L3 inspection. Members noted that enhanced scrutiny of L2 provision was expected this year with January date to be confirmed, for a substantial submission to DfE.

In response to the Chair's query as to the value of the extensive data requested, the Principal confirmed ongoing frustration across the sector at the number of requests for data, which had already been provided, to be submitted in different formats. A meeting between Principals and the Director of FE on this issue would take place on 27 September.

Dr Monteith highlighted the next big piece of work to take place would be supporting development of Open University (OU) provision.. Areas of opportunity identified include a specialism in computing, and a foundation degree in housing in collaboration with North West College through the curriculum hub.

**63.10 Student Experience Report**

Mr McCartney referred to the incoming student governor, Tom Dornan, who would take up position on 1 October. He extended thanks to Amy Morrow for her work with the GB last year.

Members noted that scheduling of this report would, in future, be moved to quarter 2, in order to allow delivery by the student representative.

A verbal summary of the report was provided by Mr McCartney and members welcomed the excellent comments in the report, provided by HE students.

**Action: Mr McCartney would provide an executive summary in future reports.**

### **63.11 Annual Safeguarding Report**

Committee noted the contents of this report and Mr McCartney highlighted the work carried out through Operation Encompass and Inspire.

The Principal expressed concern at the increase in cases of self-harm, threats and suicide. In response to his query on whether measures in place were as effective as they could be, Mr McCartney detailed the process for all points of contact and the upcoming implementation of a debriefing mechanism for any staff affected. Dr Monteith also highlighted the effectiveness of training for staff and noted the roll out of further enhanced training.

### **63.12 Complaints Report 2022/23**

Dr Monteith spoke to this report which demonstrated compliance with the complaints procedure and improvement in complaints handling.

Members noted the requirements of the OU for monitoring and reporting of complaints data, which would be reflected in the presentation of the report to Committee going forward.

### **63.13 Curriculum and T&L Strategies**

Mrs Brown referred to the Curriculum Strategy, which had first been shared in May for feedback, and advised that any final comments could be incorporated into the final version. For the benefit of new members, she outlined the basis for the strategy which would aim to drive efficiencies in delivery whilst adapting to upcoming pressures and changes.

During a period of discussion Mrs Brown stated the focus of the remaining 2 years of the strategy would be on rebalancing of the curriculum aligned to the Skills Barometer and L3-L5. The Principal explained the link with the College's 3-year plan, with the CDP set based on the strategy, and ties to the opening of the new campuses and expansion plans. Members did, however, note the impact of the budget on the report which would be realigned over the coming years subject to resources.

### **63.14 Any Other Business**

The Chair advised the intention to move the cycle of Committee meetings going forward, to take place in October, mid-January, March and May/June dates to align with Directorate reporting requirements. With this in mind, it was agreed that the meeting scheduled for

November 2023 would go ahead and that a further meeting to review the annual QIP submission would be scheduled for mid-January. Committee's recommendation would then be shared with the GB Chair for approval on behalf of the GB, as per last year.

The Chair noted that QIPs continued to be carried out internally by the College throughout the year.

**Action: The annual 4 meeting Education Committee cycle to be realigned as above for the incoming year.**

**63.15 Date of next meeting**

14 November 2023 on MS Teams.

The meeting concluded at 5.45pm.

Dr P Graham 

Date 14 November 2023

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)