

Northern Regional College

Governing Body – Unreserved Business

Minutes of the Unreserved Meeting of the Governing Body held on Thursday, 18 May 2017 at Farm Lodge Campus, Ballymena commencing at 5.45pm.

Present:

Mrs I Allison, Mrs J Eve, Mr K Chambers, Mr H Crossey (Acting Chair), Mr W Hutchinson, Mr R Jay, Dr D Lennox, Ms Y Mallon, Dr K McCambridge, Mr B McCluggage Mrs G McConnell, Mr K Nelson, Prof T Scott (Principal)

In Attendance:

Mr M Higgins, Mr D Hewitt, Mr V Taggart
Mrs C Robinson, Secretary

Welcome

The Acting Chair welcomed Governing Body members and SLT to the meeting.

76.1 Apologies

Dr S Brankin.

76.2 Declaration of Interest

None.

76.3 Minutes of Last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 March 2017 were approved.

Proposed: Mr B McCluggage

Seconded: Mrs I Allison

76.4 Matters Arising

Prof Scott responded to Dr Lennox's query on the community engagement presentation deferred from a previous meeting, noting that this would be scheduled for the next meeting.

Action: Community engagement presentation to be scheduled for the June Governing Body meeting.

Prof Scott informed the Governing Body of a potential tax issue linked to members' remuneration. Mr Higgins advised that the matter had been raised for discussion at a meeting of Finance Officers earlier in the day and guidance was being sought from the Department. Governors were alerted to the potential for tax liability on mileage claims. Further information would be shared with members once there was clarity on the issue.

76.5 Chair's Communication

None.

76.6 Principal's Report

The Acting Chair indicated that the Principal's report would be taken as read and Prof Scott was invited to highlight any pertinent matters.

Prof Scott reported that a further round of VES had been offered. She indicated there had been a significant take up in previous years and it was expected to be a targeted and smaller departure this year. Details had already been circulated to staff.

Mr Chambers sought additional information in respect of financial sustainability and the recruitment activity for full time/associate lecturers. Prof Scott gave assurances that the College would remain within the number agreed in the SIP/Development Plan and that the College had delivered savings and efficiencies overall and would continue to do so.

The Governing Body noted the Principal's report along with additional information provided by Prof Scott.

76.7 Correspondence

The Acting Chair referred to the correspondence received since the last meeting.

- i) NRC Annual Provider Review 2016/17 outcome letter – congratulations were extended to everyone involved in the review. The outcome - 'meets requirements – no action required' was commended.
- ii) NIAO Report April 2017 – the lessons learned in relation to KPIs were noted.
- iii) DfE guidance on conduct in the period up to the election in June was noted.
- iv) DfE communication on proposed changes to the Articles of Government was noted.
- v) DfE communication regarding the appointment of a temporary Chair was noted. No further information was available on progress.
- vi) DfE communication on Audit Training on 26 May 2017 was noted. The invitation had been circulated to all members of the Governing Body. Anyone wishing to attend should confirm with the Board Secretary. Mr Chambers, Mr Hutchinson, Mr McCluggage and Mrs McConnell indicated they were unable to attend on this date. Prof Scott encouraged members to attend but advised that similar courses were available and could be organised through other providers.

76.8 KPI Monitoring Report – Implementation of Strategic Improvement Plan

The Acting Chair reported that in response to the recent review/stocktake of the SIP it had been agreed that a new working group would be set up to work with the SLT on the development of a new strategic plan. He thanked all SIP members for their commitment to the work carried out by the Committee.

Prof Scott referred to the huge volume of work carried out on the SIP particularly over recent months. She indicated that in light of the recent stocktake further refinements would be made over the summer with the help of the working group.

KPI 1: Ensuring student recruitment meets enrolment targets and students successfully complete their programme of study.

Mr Taggart provided an update on performance against targets for KPI 1. He indicated that the target for 2016/17 was based on previous year trends and highlighted that the College's present position was better than predicated for year end. However, as targets had not been met the risk status was classified as red. Mr Taggart highlighted that action taken to improve retention figures across all Departments had been effective with an increase in FLUs being achieved. Currently overall retention was 2% below the SIP target with the exception of HE full time provision which was on track to reach the year-end target. Issues with work based learning retention rates were noted along with Prof Scott's comments on the need for more timely monitoring in this area. Attention was also drawn to the variation in essential skills retention across departments and the reasons for greater drop-out rate in some areas.

KPI 5: Delivering Long Term Financial Sustainability

Mr Higgins reported that the amber status for the KPI was due to a reduction in student numbers and a requirement to deliver efficiency savings in 2017/18. He suggested that further uncertainty around the budget could result in the risk changing to red in the risk register. There would be challenges if savings were required and this would be considered when the draft budget was presented to the Resources Committee in June. Mr Higgins highlighted that there would be no firm indication from the Department on the 2017/18 budget until after the summer.

The Acting Chair stated there had been no major surprises this year, but there would be challenges in terms of capital and revenue in the coming year.

KPI 11: Diversifying Income

Mr Higgins reported that income was below target with considerable downward pressure on both entitlement framework and commercial income. Staff cost controls were in place, targets were being revised in this area and attention was being focused on identifying new/additional funding schemes. New initiatives were also being developed across all provisions. The amber status was noted.

Mr McCluggage queried the benefit of the College diversifying when the Department demanded savings. Members noted that this provided the College with scope to divert funding to different areas/in year activities.

Mr Higgins provided additional information in answer to Mr Hutchinson's query on why TfS funding was reduced. He added that this had been lower than expected but the College was hoping for growth in this area in the future by extending the provision.

Mr Jay sought clarity on how funding/income from FLU and work based learning differed and suggested there were benefits in increasing work based learning courses.

The Governing Body noted the update report on KPIs 1, 5 and 11.

76.9 Audit & Risk Committee

Dr Lennox referred to the draft minutes of the meeting held on 3 May 2017 and summarised the business addressed. He referred to the Vice-Principal's (Teaching & Learning) informative presentation on student numbers; Ms O'Hagan's update on the outcome of the NIAO marking study and the satisfactory assurance received by each of the three Internal Audit reports presented.

Mrs Eve commented on the external auditor's response to the marking study, noting that it appeared that nothing major had been flagged up in the report. Dr Lennox indicated that Ms O'Hagan had still to finalise the report and there had been no commitment to the outcome or the timeline for receipt of the final report.

Mr McCluggage referred to recent cyber attacks and sought assurance that a cyber resilience risk assessment had been undertaken and controls to mitigate any risk to the College had been put in place. Mr Higgins indicated that the IT department had been proactive. He suggested that the IT manager could attend the next Audit and Risk Committee meeting to provide an update.

Action: IT Manager to present to Audit & Risk Committee

Dr Lennox reported that the risk register had been reviewed at the committee meeting and the student numbers and STS project (red status risks), had been discussed in detail. He referenced the Health Check report which highlighted the sector wide trend relating to student numbers and the STS project.

The Acting Chair asked for an update on the STS project. Mr Higgins reported that additional information had been included in the original business case which had then been presented to the Department. This had cleared the first stage of the Department's process. In the interim the College was considering an extension period with the current service providers.

The Committee Chair confirmed that Mrs Allison and Mr McCluggage had joined the Audit & Risk Committee.

The draft minutes of the meeting on 3 May 2017 were noted by the Governing Body.

76.10 Resources Committee

Mr Crossey drew attention to the draft minutes of the last committee meeting circulated for information. He reported that Mr Chambers had agreed to chair the committee meetings during his period as Acting Chair of the Governing Body.

Mr Crossey referred to changes in banking mentioned in the minutes and highlighted that all Colleges were required to move to the Civil Service Bank by 1 August 2017.

The Governing Body noted the Committee's recommendation and approved the change to the College's bank.

Mr Higgins provided an update on the outsourcing of facilities management noting that he was hopeful that the process would be completed by September 2017.

The draft minutes of the meeting on 27 March 2017 were noted by the Governing Body.

76.11 Campus 21

As Governing Body representative on the New Build Project Board, Mr McCluggage provided an update on progress. He said that there had been significant forward movement with the purchase of the land in Coleraine, discussion on changes to the Schedule of Accommodation, project footprint and accommodation numbers, as well as the future decant. The project timeline had also been considered along with the decoupling of the two projects once the design stage was reached. Clarification was sought in relation to the Gateway review and community relations. Mr McCluggage indicated that a comprehensive risk register was already in place.

Prof Scott advised that community relations was a standing item on the Project Board agenda and communications with key stakeholders had been increased. Issues anticipated with some aspects of the project had been managed well.

Mr Higgins replied to Mr Hutchinson's query about planning applications noting that the project team had been proactive in this area. Meetings had already been held with planners and initial responses had been positive.

Mrs McConnell apprised members of discussion at the Capital Steering Group meeting earlier in May. She stated that assurances had been received on student numbers and the schedule of accommodation. Prof Scott confirmed that in light of work carried out by the Project Director, SLT and HoDs on ETI requirements she was confident that the projections were realistic.

Mr Chambers referred to the risk associated with the proposed timeline and the effect of a mid-year decant should the deadline for completion be missed. Prof Scott referred to experiences identified by other Colleges and agreed that although a mid-year move would present challenges these could be managed. Mr Higgins confirmed this was recorded on the risk register.

The Acting Chair noted that it was reassuring that good progress was being made and risks were being managed appropriately.

76.12 Students' Union Constitution

Prof Scott indicated that the Students' Union Constitution had been considered at a previous Education Committee meeting and had required further revision. She outlined why the document required updating and referred to the work undertaken by the Laura Firth, Head of Student Experience/Services and Vincent Taggart, Vice-Principal Teaching & Learning. She noted that the Chair of the Education Committee had also had sight of the amendments prior to circulation. Prof Scott advised that due to timing issues the document was being presented directly to the Governing Body for approval and changes proposed were clearly tracked.

The Governing Body noted the amendments and briefly discussed issues around the Student President/Governor role. The Chair reiterated that there had been wide consultation on the document with other Colleges and the Department and recommended approval.

The Governing Body accepted the recommendation and approved the revised Students' Union Constitution.

76.13 DfE Health Check 2016/17 – Issue 2

Mr Higgins referred to the most recent Health Check noting that on the whole it was a positive report for the College. He highlighted that expenditure is within the 0.5% target at the end of March; the Audit and Risk Committee had considered and were content with the status of risks reported in the register and performance in relation to student numbers/FLUs although below target, reflected difficulties experienced sector wide.

The Board noted the report and the key points raised.

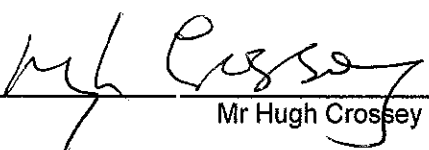
76.14 Any Other Business

No other business was raised.

76.15 Date of Next Meeting


The Acting Chair confirmed the next meeting would be held at Farm Lodge Campus on Wednesday 28 June 2017 and would commence with a short workshop at 4pm.

The unreserved business meeting ended at 7.10pm



Mr Hugh Crossley (Acting Chair)

Date 28/6/2017
28 June 2017



Mrs C Robinson (Secretary)