

NORTHERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Education Committee meeting held on Wednesday 25 September 2024 in Newtownabbey campus commencing at 4.00 pm

Present: Dr P Graham (Chair), Mr M Higgins, Mr G McAllister, Mr B Patterson, Mr S Shevlin (audio), Mr D Small

In Attendance: Ms M Bellingham (items 7 and 8), Mrs C Brown, Ms N Davidson (items 7 and 8), Mr C Fairless (items 7 and 8), Ms H Hampsey, Mr S Laverty Mr S McCartney, Dr L Monteith

Secretary: Mrs K Wallace

68.1 Apologies Ms Hemphill and Mr Laverty.

68.2 Declarations of Interest None.

68.3 Minutes of the Last Meeting

The draft minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2024 were approved.

Proposed: Mr Small Seconded: Mr Higgins

68.4 Matters Arising

None.

68.5 Chair's Communication/Correspondence

The Chair referred to the list of priorities outlined for the 2024/25 Education Committee agenda cycle (action plan below) and advised that information subsequently received from DfE now required a review of the timeframe for each.

Action Plan

- i. November - Enrolment, Student Experience Annual Report, SER/QIP.
- ii. February - L2 Traineeship.
- iii. May - Community Provision 2024/25 and planned, proposed new and withdrawn provision 2025/26.

It was agreed that the order of priorities would be reviewed and a plan of action developed for each meeting.

The Chair reported his attendance at the British Council Study USA graduation ceremony and noted that the College now had a mature student taking part. The T&L Directorate was promoting this programme and plans to increase participation next year were in process.

Mrs Brown agreed to look into the Washington Ireland Programme, which Mr McAllister advised was now aimed at the FE cohort.

Committee noted that information on ETI commissioning, the HLA Letter of Offer 24/25 and the HLA Business Case, would be covered in the VP TL Summary Report.

Noted that approval for the Widening Access and Participation Plan (WAPP) 2024/25 had been received.

68.6 VP Teaching & Learning Summary Report

Mrs Brown addressed her Report and focused on key areas, including: additional funding secured; lecturer recruitment; Traineeship and HLA interim evaluations by Strategic Investment Board (SIB); and ETI inspections 2024/25. She would inform the Chair of inspection dates when known.

There was discussion on the outcome of the postponed electrical installation programme, with a planned restart in January, and on the impact of Essential Skills outcomes on overall success figures. This would be looked at further in the SER/QIP process, as the substantive agenda item for November meeting..

Mr Higgins referred to his trip with the Chair to the WorldSkills event in Lyon and reported awards had been achieved by all participating College students. In relation to sector collaboration, he noted that this was likely to be referred to at the GB meeting on 2 October, when representatives of DfE would be attending.

Referring to the range of good news stories Mrs Brown particularly noted the success of Charlie Carson and Jason Scott in being awarded a Medallion of Excellence at WorldSkills, as part of Team UK.

Mr Fairless, Ms Bellingham and Mrs Davidson joined the meeting at 4.35pm.

68.7 Enrolment Update

Ms Hampsey presented enrolment statistics to 12 September and updated on the current position with these dynamic figures. Members noted areas of high performance, many of which had now exceeded target, along with a number of areas of challenge.

Mr Higgins reported higher than anticipated growth in FE enrolments across the sector and outlined the background to a more streamlined enrolment process being used in the College, which had enabled more accurate returns. In relation to areas of challenge, Ms Hampsey referred to curriculum provision under review due to low enrolments..

68.8 Support for Recruitment 2024

Mr Fairless introduced Ms Bellingham and Mrs Davidson.

Ms Bellingham presented details on the marketing activities supporting recruitment for 2024/25 and answered a number of questions put forward by members in relation to: development of social media; use of College 'influencers'; follow up on potential students; and use of generative AI tools. She noted areas for improvement, in particular investment in the College website, a paper on rebuilding of which was currently in development.

Members noted the limit on budget for marketing activities set for government advertising campaigns..

Mrs Davidson outlined services and activities provided by the College in support of recruitment, along with sector engagement activity for 2023/24. Activities which had proven to work well were detailed and proposed improvements against a number of constraints and challenges were recognised, including the importance of treating applicants as individuals.

Dr Graham thanked the presenters for an excellent report at very short notice. He commended the extensive recruitment support expertise in the College and referred to the need for flexibility of budget limits set by DfE to maximise use of same.

The Principal highlighted the importance of the independent advice provided to young people by the careers team and felt that this had been picked up by the Minister.

Ms Bellingham, Mrs Davidson, Mr Fairless and Mr Small left the meeting at 5.40pm.

68.9 Annual Quality Report 2023-24

Dr Monteith was invited to present her paper providing summary of QIP progress and ongoing actions; update on malpractice/maladministration; and a summary of complaints. She noted that actions and areas for improvement would be transferred onto the new SER/QIP, template for which had still to be formalised and timeframes established.

The Principal would raise the need for a set timeframe at the Principals' Group meeting on 26 September.

Dr Monteith reported on recent engagement with Dr Lorna Warren in respect of information requests. The Principal confirmed that information provision accorded with that required of the College by the Partnership Agreement.

The Chair agreed the above and noted no further resource was available.

Dr Monteith confirmed that all complaints had now been followed through and closed off.

68.10 Annual Safeguarding Report 2023-24

Mr McCartney presented his paper and highlighted key issues including the increase in mental health referrals; and the number of calls relating to domestic abuse, noting the success of the Operation Encompass partnership in supporting students affected by this issue.

The Chair expressed his surprise on learning about some of the situations experienced by students and thanked Mr McCartney and the safeguarding team for their professionalism in handling these issues.

The Principal questioned whether anything more could be done to raise awareness of the increase in reports of self-harm and domestic violence. Mr McCartney advised that the College is represented as part of a workstream feeding into the Department of Health's Mental Health Strategy, which had a conference coming up in April 2025.

The Principal noted that the growth in enrolment numbers could further increase the impact on the safeguarding, student services and curriculum teams.

68.13 Any Other Business

The Chair confirmed he had been reappointed to a second term off office with the Governing Body.

68.14 Date of next meeting 20 November 2024.

The meeting closed at 6.00 pm.

Dr P Graham 

Date 20 November 2024

(Chair)

Mrs K Wallace 

(Secretary)