

MINUTES OF THE 24TH MEETING OF THE GENERAL TEACHING COUNCIL FOR N.I., HELD ON THURSDAY 17TH APRIL 2008 AT ARMAGH CITY HOTEL

Present

Mr Alistair Orr (Chair)	Dr Theo Laverty
Mr Ivan Arbuthnot	Mr John McGrady
Mrs Rosemary Barton	Mrs La'Verne Montgomery
Mrs Susan Campbell	Ms Daisy Mules
Mr John Colgan	Mrs Thea Patton
Mr Joe Corrigan	Mr John Pollock
Mrs Frances Donnelly	Mr Peter Scott
Mrs Teresa Graham	Mr Keith Smith
Mr Gary Haire	Mr Gordon Topping
Mrs Miriam Karp	Mr Damian Walls
Mr Tony Lappin	

In Attendance

Mr Eddie McArdle (Registrar, GTCNI)
Mr Barnaby Ball (Planning and Corporate Services Manager)
Mr Gerry Devlin (Senior Education Officer, GTCNI)
Ms Deirdre Lavery (Finance & Admin Manager, GTCNI)
Mrs Lesley Dickson (PA to the Registrar, GTCNI)
Mr John Anderson (Head of Professional Practice, GTCS)
Mr Kevin Pascoe (Policy and Planning Manager, GTCW)

Apologies

Mrs Sally McKee
Mrs Dorothy Black
Dr Leslie Caul
Mr Malachy Doherty
Mr Charles Glenn
Rev Lee Glenny
Mr Ronnie Hassard
Mr John Kerr
Mr Brendan McConville
Mrs Audrey Stewart

1. APOLOGIES

In the absence of the Council Chair, Mrs Sally McKee, the Vice-Chair, Mr Alistair Orr, chaired this meeting. The apologies were noted. The Chair welcomed Mr John Anderson, GTCS, Mr Kevin Pascoe, GTCW and the new Council member Mr Gary Haire.

2. COUNCIL MINUTES (GTC/08/Min23)

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, proposed by Mr Tony Lappin and seconded by Mrs Rosemary Barton as a correct record.

3. MATTERS ARISING

None

4. CHAIR'S BUSINESS

The Chair informed members that Mrs Sally McKee was unable to be present today as she was in New Zealand.

The Chair informed members that the Pramerica awards had been held at the beginning of April and were attended by Mrs Sally McKee, who also co-presented the awards. The speaker that evening had been the Minister of Education. The Registrar said that it had been a wonderful evening and complimented the children involved.

The Chair congratulated Officers and staff on the obvious hard work which had contributed to make the Annual Lecture an outstanding success.

He also informed members that the NASUWT Conference in Birmingham had been attended by both himself and the Senior Education Officer and thanked Mr Peter Scott for his hospitality.

5. OFFICERS' BUSINESS

The Registrar informed members that a meeting had been arranged with the Permanent Secretary to have discussions with delegates from the Council.

6. REGISTRATION THE WAY FORWARD (GTC08/24/P1)

The Chairman introduced this item, saying that it is a significant paper, then the Planning and Corporate Services Manager presented the paper to members. He explained how the Council's registration processes will be impacted upon by the wider regulatory landscape and environment. Mr Ball explained that this is an initial paper and asked for approval from the Council, to move these concepts forward.

He stated that the Council should consider registration developments in three areas:

- a further consideration of ‘professional suitability’, and how the Council might use Access NI enhanced disclosures, to inform decisions as to the professional suitability of those applying to register with the Council;
- the establishment of a ‘Student Registration’ category, for Northern Ireland ITE Students; and
- the establishment of a ‘Provisional Registration’ category, which would be offered to those who cannot demonstrate that they meet the requirements for full registration.

He advised members that in terms of ‘professional suitability’, the Council currently determines whether or not an applicant is ‘suitable’ to be admitted to the Register of Teachers, using a number of procedures. In addition to considering an applicant’s qualifications, the Council seeks confirmation from DE’s Teachers’ Branch that the applicant is not ‘on’ List 99 and it seeks confirmation from DE’s Pupil Support Unit, that the applicant is not on an ‘Unsuitable Persons List’ (POCVA). Finally, checks with the other GTCs to make sure that the applicant is not subject to disciplinary order issued by them.

He went on to inform members that the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act, 2006 and the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups (NI) Order 2007, created a new executive NDPB called the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA). All those working in regulated activity, with children and vulnerable adults, will be required to become a member of the ‘scheme’, which will be established by the ISA. The ISA will complete background checks on applicants and will continually review relevant information about scheme members. If new information comes to light, leading the ISA to bar an existing member of the scheme from working in regulated activity, employers and Keepers of Registers, will be notified that this person is no longer a member of the ISA scheme. As a result of these developments the Council should give further consideration to making use of disclosure information at the point of entry to the Register.

Mr Ball summarised the details of Student Registration for members and said the case for the Council establishing a student registration category is a strong one. As a consequence of the SVG legislation, and building on work undertaken by GTC England, it would make sense to admit ITE students to the Council’s Register at the point of their admission to ITE programmes/courses. This category of registration will help connect ITE students more closely with the work of the Council, and will ensure that the Council’s registration is compatible with the changes that will arise from the establishment of the ISA.

He went on to discuss the concept of ‘provisional registration’ and said that, as the Council gains more experience of assessment of qualifications, it is becoming apparent that it would be very useful to have the option of offering certain applicants ‘provisional’ rather than full registration. This more sophisticated and nuanced approach to registration would:

- help the Council ensure that those educated/trained outwith Northern Ireland, are fully conversant with the schooling system here, and the requirements of the revised Northern Ireland curriculum;
- enable the Council to apply compensation measures, as provided for by the EU Directive 2005/36; and
- bring the Council's approach to registration more closely into alignment with the approaches taken by GTC Scotland and the Teaching Council of Ireland.

Members were then asked to consider the proposals contained in the paper and asked to approve that the Council moves ahead with the new registration concepts. In considering the proposal members raised a number of issues:

- the extent of any review/appeal that was available to applicants. Mr Ball confirmed that the Council offered 'rejected applicants' a 'review of decision opportunity'.
- the role of the ISA and how barring decision would be made. Mr Ball commented that the ISA's role and operating processes had a statutory basis, and as further details emerge, these will be brought to the Council's attention; and
- the costs associated with vetting/barring and who should be responsible for these. Mr Ball agreed with members that every effort should be made by the Council to co-ordinate and liaise with other bodies, to ensure the minimum of duplication and cost.

Members noted that other regulatory bodies were facing many of the issues raised. In conclusion, Mr Ball confirmed that the Council will continue to work closely with sister GTCs and other regulators, to develop a sound and coherent policy position in terms of regulatory developments.

The Chairman asked that members agree to further examine these issues. This was proposed by Mrs Teresa Graham and seconded by Mr Damien Walls, and members concurred.

7. ANNUAL REPORT - DRAFT – CONCLUSION (GTC08/24/P2)

The Registrar introduced this paper and alluded to the fact that the paper had gone to the various committees and thus he intended to dwell on the narrative rather than the "outcome tables" at the back of the report.

In reviewing the year the Registrar addressed amongst other things:

- the new political dispensation;
- the notion of professional accountability;

- professionally led regulations;
- the growing significance of the ARRTS repository now that the Cambridge Review Materials and the TLRP materials have been made available; and
- the need for a review of CPD provision to take account of both the nature of professional learning and the need to develop a “mixed economy” model.

The Registrar concluded by reminding members that GTCNI worked within limited resources and once again had achieved a remarkable amount in the course of the year. Members extended their thanks to officers for their diligence.

8. DRAFT ANNUAL ACCOUNTS 2007/2008 (GTC08/24/P3)

The Finance and Administration Manager presented the Draft Annual Accounts. She informed members that the accounts would be discussed with Moore Stephens and she outlined various reserves the Council has at present and the need to build up reserves for the future. The Chair thanked the Finance and Administration Manager for her paper.

Mr Haire asked if the Council were subject to SORP Regulations and asked about our reserves policy. Ms Lavery said that a policy paper on this matter was going to the GP&F and Audit Committees. Mr Colgan enquired about how the Council's fees compared to the fees charged by the other GTCs, and if allowance payments were made in other jurisdictions. The Planning and Corporate Services Manager gave details of the fees charged by the other GTCs and indicated that there was a range of fee allowance payment arrangements.

He then informed members that the Council was in the process of having its audit situation clarified by DE and the NIAO, and he would report back to Council on this matter in due course.

9. BUSINESS PLAN AND DRAFT BUDGET 2008/2009 (GTC08/24/P4)

The Registrar introduced this paper and noted that at the time of great change there would, of necessity, be changes in the business priorities as the year progressed. He did, however, note three significant areas which he suggested would loom large in the life of the Council in the coming year, namely:

- the refinement of protocols regarding accreditation of courses and the approval of qualifications;
- the development of position papers in respect of Registration policy, eg Provisional/Student/ or Active Legislation.
- training of Council members in respect of regulations.

With regard to the latter he noted that the scheduling of training would be dependent on the passage of legislation through the Assembly. Members

approved the plan and associated budget and noted that the work programme was ambitious, yet achievable, and commended officers for their work.

10. EVERY SCHOOL A GOOD SCHOOL (GTC08/24/P5)

The Chairman introduced this item and noted that the paper had been the sole agenda item in an extraordinary meeting of the Council's Policy and Professional Education Committee.

The Registrar reviewed the paper and drew attention to the following issues:

- the volatile policy environment within which DE is currently working.
- the failure to recognise that successful change management requires cultural change on behalf of the teaching profession
- the failure within the document to recognise the significance of the independent professional regulator and accountability.
- the failure to acknowledge the existence of teacher competences and the GTCNI role in defining these; and
- the failure to recognise the reality that professional autonomy, empowerment and accountability are inextricably linked.

Members again expressed grave reservations about the tone of the consultation document and noted that it might more properly be seen as a policy for "failing schools".

The Registrar informed Council members that a meeting had been scheduled with the Permanent Secretary to explore the Department's views in regard to the functions of GTCNI.

At the conclusion of discussion the paper was endorsed by the Council.

11. DRAFT STATISTICAL RETURN (GTC08/24/P6)

The Planning and Corporate Services Manager introduced this paper and asked members to note that it was an initial draft. He reviewed the data tables and indicated that further data analysis would be undertaken. Figures were given for the employment of recent graduates, and Mr Ball concluded by saying that the Council was building a useful set of statistics and this would be a significant source of data to help inform future policy decisions.

12. COMMITTEE MINUTES

(i) Audit Committee (AC/08/Min15)

Mrs Teresa Graham presented the Audit Committee minutes to Council as an accurate record of the meeting. She outlined the details of Equality Training and the costs of disciplinary cases.

(ii) General Purposes & Finance (GP&FC/08/Min22)

Mr Orr presented the General Purposes and Finance Committee minutes to the Council as an accurate record of the meeting. He informed members that Dr Wilfred Mulryne had resigned from the Council and that Mr Damian Walls would be the new Vice-Chairman. He discussed the draft income and expenditure and outlined guidance of attendance at conferences.

(iii) Policy Committee (PC/08/Min 24)

Mr Lappin presented the Policy Committee Minutes to the Council as an accurate record of the meeting. He said that it had been a busy period for the Policy Committee regarding the discussion of the Confidential paper and the GTCNI role. He informed members that the Committee had a presentation from C2K and also from Prof Beck Francis of Roehampton University on Gender and Teaching. He discussed the Every School a Good School response which had been endorsed by Council and mentioned the change of name of the Policy Committee which will now be known as Policy and Professional Education Committee.

(iv) Registration Committee (RC/08/Min21)

Mr Scott presented the Registration Committee Minutes to the Council as an accurate record of the meeting.

(v) Risk Management Committee (RMC/03/Mins 3)

The Planning and Corporate Services Manager presented the Risk Management Committee minutes as an accurate record of the meeting. He informed members that the Committee had prioritised the areas of risk and scored them accordingly on the risk register. He advised members that an immediate priority was the Council's IT infrastructure, and that officers and the Council's IT consultants were addressing these risks and implementing mitigation measures. He told members that the Committee were also given a presentation by the IT consultants on the above issues. Ms Frances Donnelly thanked the officers for their work.

13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None

14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next Council meeting will be held in the Stormont Hotel on 19th June 2008.

Signed Dated.....