

Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Wednesday 31st March 2020 at 17:30
via Skype teleconference

Item No	Item
1.	<p>Chair’s Business</p> <p>a) Attendance and Apologies</p> <p>Present: Mrs H Reid, Mr K Webb (Principal/CEO), Mr G Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Mr J Mackell, Prof A Woodside, Mrs K Fraser, Mr N Bodger, Mr S Pollard, Mr A Corbett, Mrs C King, Mr D Stanley</p> <p>In Attendance: Mrs H McKee (Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support) (the “Director of SPQ&S”), Dr M Malone (Director of Curriculum & Information Services) (the “Director of C&IS”), Mr N Parfitt (Boardroom Apprentice), Ms S Woods (Temporary Secretary to the Governing Body)</p> <p>Apologies: It was noted that Mrs H Miller (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development) was unable to attend the meeting, and her apologies were duly noted.</p> <p>In the Chair: Mrs H Reid</p> <p>The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the participants for attending via Skype teleconference. She noted the serious and worrying circumstances surrounding the Covid-19 pandemic, and she indicated her hope that all participants and their families remained safe and well.</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest</p> <p>No conflicts of interest were made in relation to the tabled agenda items.</p> <p>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 12th February 2020</p> <p>The Chair invited members to review the minutes from the previous meeting. The Temporary Secretary noted that minor amendments had been made to the minutes to reflect Mrs King’s</p>

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attendance at the meeting and to incorporate feedback which had been received prior to the meeting. The Committee agreed the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting.

Agreed: That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February 2020, subject to incorporation of the discussed amendments, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the meeting of the Governing Body to be held on 27th April 2020.

Proposed by: Alan Woodside

Seconded by: Karen Fraser

d) Chair’s Update

The Chair noted that the standard agenda had been amended to reflect the changes which had taken place in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. She observed that, in her meeting with the Principal and the Director of SPQ&S during the previous week, it had been agreed to give the Committee an update regarding the actions and activities the College had been undertaking and to give the Committee members an opportunity to raise any questions or concerns they might have. She indicated that this presentation was reflected under agenda item 5a.

The Chair observed that the College Development Plan and a presentation on careers should have been included on the agenda for the current meeting. She noted that the careers presentation itself had been deferred but there was very positive reference made regarding careers in the report on the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation under agenda item 5b. With respect to the College Development Plan, she asked the Director of SPQ&S to provide the Committee with a verbal update.

The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that the initial deadline had been extended from March into April and that, following the meeting between the principals and the DfE, there had been some indications that the date would now be extended into June. The Principal remarked

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	<p>that the date would be the end of June and that, although formal confirmation had not yet been received, it was expected to arrive with the budget.</p> <p>The Chair indicated that, should it be necessary to hold an extra meeting of the Education Committee it would be arranged. She noted that she would keep the Temporary Chair apprised of any developments.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Action Point: The Chair to keep the Temporary Chair apprised of any developments with respect to the due date for the College Development Plan.</p> </div>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a) Action Points from the meeting held on 12th February 2020</p> <p>The Chair observed that there had been significant change since the date of the previous meeting, which had necessarily impacted on priorities. However, she confirmed that all action points had either been completed or would be addressed during the course of the meeting.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Correspondence</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">a) Correspondence regarding the ETI Inspection held during the week commencing 2nd March 2020</p> <p>At the Chair’s invitation, the Principal informed the meeting that the letter received from the ETI, in relation to the Inspectorate Evaluation, had been purely to confirm that the College had been found highly competent in relation to SER and QIP. He asked if any of the Committee members had any comments or questions regarding the letter. The Chair remarked that, during her entire career, she had never heard feedback like that received by the College during the oral feedback meeting. She indicated that the word ‘Excellent’ had been used seven times during the meeting,</p>

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	<p>and she noted that there would be further opportunity for discussion, regarding the Inspectorate Evaluation, under Item 5b. of the agenda.</p>
4.	<p>Social Inclusion</p> <p>a) Engagement Update Report</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S presented the Engagement Update Report, noting that it looked slightly different to the version usually circulated to the Committee, due to the current pandemic. She observed that activities at the start of term had gone well, particularly the engagement with Radius Housing which had been very successful. She explained that the College had engaged with twenty-two housing officers, covering a wide geographical area, and had developed plans for moving ahead. Sadly, these plans had been put on hold due to Covid-19.</p> <p>Turning to the topic of Careers, the Director of SPQ&S reported that significant changes had been made to the work that was underway, again due to the pandemic, for the Careers, Community Engagement and Marketing teams. She noted that there had been a big drive to increase applications but that the focus had necessarily moved to providing access to courses online. She indicated that all the relevant information was provided in the report and that she was happy to take any questions the Committee members might have.</p> <p>The Temporary Chair commended the Director of SPQ&S and her team for the amount of engagement activity that was still underway. He remarked that, while there was a lot of work being carried out, it was important to guard against losing momentum. He commented that, whenever the pandemic situation had normalized, people would be busy trying to return to their previous focus and it was important to keep the contact going as it could take six to twelve months to regain the momentum if it was lost.</p>

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Mr Mackell observed that there had been open days scheduled for June, which were now unlikely to take place. He asked what kind of options were in place to engage remotely with the wider community. The Director of SPQ&S replied that the College had moved all teams online. She noted that engagement looked different and that there was an increase in the use of social media to try to share what the College was doing online. At present, she noted that the College was sharing publicly some information that would usually be circulated internally, such as tips to help people work remotely and that more information would be circulated during the coming week to highlight that SERC was still online, students were still being taught and applications were being taken online.

The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that the Careers team was also working online with students, in conjunction with the teaching teams, and were encouraging online applications. She noted that the team continued to produce weekly newsletters and were still receiving queries from current students. She observed that the College would be going out with a stronger message to say it was still there as a community resource and that there would continue to be an increasing online presence visible to the public. Mr Mackell commented that there was a lot of good work being carried out, under difficult circumstances.

The Principal echoed the Director of SPQ&S’s statement regarding social media. He indicated that the College would be back in contact with Radius Housing and would push to see how much it would be possible to achieve online.

Professor Woodhouse asked what the College’s involvement with primary schools related to. The Director of SPQ&S replied that there were a number of activities where students from the primary schools were invited to taster sessions in the College campuses, making the children aware of what opportunities were available at the College, and raising awareness within the



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	<p>schools and Parent-Teacher Associations. Professor Woodside remarked that this was a very positive involvement.</p> <p><i>At this juncture Messrs Pollard, Parfitt and Stanley joined the meeting.</i></p> <p>The Chair provided Messrs Pollard, Parfitt and Stanley with a summary of the portion of the meeting which had taken place prior to their joining.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>College Strategic and Operational Activities</p> <p><i>At this juncture, Mr Bodger joined the meeting.</i></p> <p>a) College Activities in Coronavirus Emergency</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S asked the participants to open the presentation, which had been previously circulated, on their PCs or laptops. She noted that the presentation provided a brief overview of what the College had been doing during the previous three weeks. Turning to page two of the presentation, the Director of SPQ&S observed that this slide reflected the overview of the report, grouping the response to the pandemic into four key areas; management of the process, how the crisis had developed and how it had escalated, showing a summary of risk management and critical incident discussions, highlighting the range of activities the College had undertaken, and concluding with information on the current status.</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S highlighted the significant amount of work which had been undertaken by College staff and noted that the amount which had been achieved, in such a short space of time, was incredible. She commented that staff members had worked very long hours, while feeling anxious about the situation for themselves, their families and loved ones. She asked the Committee to bear this in mind as the presentation proceeded.</p>

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Turning to page three of the presentation, the Director of SPQ&S noted that the table reflected information regarding the risk management meetings chaired by the CFO, which had been held during the period, and what the process had been like for CMT. She noted that there were brief references to the key topics of the meetings and that a more comprehensive report was being prepared for the Audit Committee. She reported that the risk management group had begun by meeting every second day, increasing to daily as the situation progressed. Starting on 26th February, the risk management group had begun to examine government advice, which continued through every meeting, discussing impact on students and staff and making whatever changes were deemed necessary. She indicated that, early in the process, discussions had centred around travel; what trips were planned and to where, what trips should be cancelled, what the FCO guidance was, and who should self-isolate. She noted that updates were provided to staff and students and to the Governing Body, and that, as the days progressed and the situation worsened, budget-holders were briefed, and the implications of campus closures was discussed.

On slide four of the presentation, the Director of SPQ&S observed that, as the situation changed the government moved to a ‘delay’ phase, and on 13th March the College had moved from Risk Management to Critical Incident Response Team, chaired by the Principal in line with the College’s Business Continuity Plan. She reported that discussions had included moving key staff such as Finance and MIS offsite and that the situation had moved on rapidly from that point. She informed that meeting that the Critical Incident Response Team had met on 16th March and started to work through moving everyone offsite, actioned work plans for the teams, and looked at equipment needs for staff who would not normally work offsite. Additionally, discussions had been held regarding not disadvantaging any staff and paying people to the end of their contracts.

She reported that staff essentially had only two days’ notice to bring everyone online, and that the work situation had been monitored at all times to ensure that no-one was overly stressed.

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She observed that the original plan had been to trial remote teaching during that week and then inform students of the plan during the week commencing 23rd March. However, the situation had escalated quickly and by the end of Friday, 20th March, following a significant amount of work and effort, almost all staff were leaving with equipment or were already working remotely.

The Director of SPQ&S emphasised the effort that the entire staff of the College had made, to ensure this took place. In particular, she highlighted the exceptional effort made by the IT section, and the thanks they were due.

Turning to slide five she stated that, for the week commencing 23rd March, effectively all sections of the College were online. She noted that campuses were still open at that point and that rotas had been set up to staff campus receptions but, again, the government advice had changed, and the campuses were closed at 14:00 on Tuesday, 24th March. She observed that campuses were currently open for two hours on Tuesdays and Fridays, for maintenance and processing of post, but that this remained under review. She informed the meeting that matters such as school meals had been discussed and it had been confirmed at the Chair’s Working Group meeting that payment would be provided to students who would normally avail of this facility. She commented that there had been discussions regarding providing PPE to the health sector and this had been organised. She indicated that food that had been made by catering students had been distributed to student who were most in need.

The Director of SPQ&S reported that discussions with the DfE were still ongoing regarding Traineeships, CDP postponement, collection of PPE and other matters, and that Dr Malone was a member of the departmental group which was trying to obtain consensus from awarding bodies. She noted that a significant amount of training had been provided by Learning Academy staff to everybody; the CHRO had created a Frequently Asked Questions for staff relating to payment of salary, working from home and other matters. She remarked that support was being given in the



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form of virtual coffee breaks, to encourage and allow staff to connect and reconnect with each other while working remotely.

She noted the outstanding work of the curriculum teams in relation to Moodle and Microsoft Teams and commented that SERC had been able to move online more readily than other colleges. She indicated that there had been an appreciable amount of work carried out in relation to IT provision, providing desktops to customer service staff and to students. She noted that there were new roles for some staff, for example LRC staff were assisting with marketing and customer services were supporting occupational studies.

The Director of SPQ&S reported that a new way of supporting students had been developed by adapting the application that was normally used for enquiries on course descriptors, which provided students with an easy way to contact the college for any support needs, on top of all the existing mechanisms. She believed this was a real demonstration of how the College had been, and continued to be, enterprising in very difficult circumstances.

Turning to slide seven, which related to delivery, she noted that the College was continuing to deliver coursework to students and that there had been good online attendance at online classes. Although some students had needed more encouragement than others, these students were being contacted and supported. She noted that there had been positive comments received from students and parents, via email and social media. She remarked that there had been a strong sense of collegiality and a strong desire among staff to ensure it was clear that SERC was fully online and available to students.

With reference to slide 8, the Director of SPQ&S noted that the College was still focused on delivering remotely for staff, and that significant training had been made available, for example, regarding Microsoft Teams which was accessible by teaching and non-teaching staff.

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Turing to slide nine, she noted that this page related to delivering to the community, which had only recently started. She remarked that this included sharing things like one-minute CPD, tips and webinars, which would normally be shared with staff, with the general public. She informed the meeting that the College’s engineering team was 3D printing reusable face masks, which could be lined, cleaned and then reused. She noted that it was hoped to be able to share these face masks with care homes.

The Director of SPQ&S highlighted that the message that SERC wanted to make clear was that the College was still open for business and that there was a lot of activity going on, in addition to the teaching. She noted that it had been challenging but that staff had been phenomenal in trying to provide support to students and in reaching out to the community. She invited the Committee members to ask questions, should they have any.

The Chair remarked that she was bowled over by the detail and breadth of information in the report, which was excellent, and she indicated that she had only the highest praise for the Director of SPQ&S and her teams.

Mr Corbett commented that the presentation had been very comprehensive and encouraging, particularly in relation to the support being given to the students and the staff, and he hoped that the momentum would continue.

Mrs Fraser noted that the presentation had been very well-executed, and she asked if there were any arrangements in place in relation to assessments as yet. The Principal replied that this matter would be addressed under Any Other Business, as it was currently the most significant challenge for the College.

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The Temporary Chair echoed the Chair’s comments regarding the presentation and the information which was provided via the Principal to the Governing Body on a daily basis. He asked that the Committee’s formal thanks be noted for the efforts staff, as a whole, had made in challenging circumstances.

Mr Mackell asked if there had been any co-ordination from the DfE in relation a sector-wide approach to contingency planning or going online. The Director of C&IS replied that the College had started preparation in September 2019 regarding Microsoft Teams and Class Notebook, which was an e-portfolio. He observed that it was a decision SERC had taken at that time to move a lot of work online, which would provide better interaction with students and would enable them to work offsite as well.

The Director of C&IS indicated that preparations, for moving online, had begun several weeks prior to the closing of the campus buildings and SERC going online. He noted that this involved Moodle content for classes being created and uploaded for two weeks in advance for all classes. He observed that the availability of training sessions had also been increased at that point. He noted that it had been hoped to carry out a trial run prior to bringing the whole College online but that ultimately, this was not possible to do due to the change in the government’s directions.

The Director of C&IS informed the meeting that hundreds of Desktop PCs had been distributed to students and staff and that the College was monitoring students and staff who needed to self-isolate and, if there were any special circumstances which could impact on examinations, it was important for the College to know as soon as possible. He observed that student attendance was almost at the same level, and in some cases was better than the previous week. He explained that the College was trying to provide synchronous classes, wherever possible, through Microsoft Teams. He reported that each of the Directors had been meeting with their teams and the Senior Managers on a daily basis.

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The Director of C&IS concluded by noting that Ms Gillian McCoy, who had led the Inspectorate Evaluation team, had contacted the College to advise that she had written a case study on how SERC had succeeded in moving online so well and so quickly, and that this case study would be shared with other colleges. The Principal reported that the case study had been shared with the Governing Body on the previous day. He noted that it was interesting that it was the Minister for Education who had requested the case study, not the Minister for the Economy. He remarked that he had found it necessary to clarify with the DfE that the colleges were not closed down, that the campus buildings were closed, but that the colleges are online and open for business, and he hoped the DfE would be clearer in ensuring this message was communicated.

Professor Woodside gave his compliments to the Director of SPQ&S for the excellent report and to all staff for having gone far beyond the call of duty. Mrs King noted that the concern for staff wellbeing was also praiseworthy. Mr Pollard asked if there was support available for students who might have digital literacy issues. The Director of SPQ&S replied that learning support had moved online and that people who had worked as classroom assistants and one-to-one mentors had received training in Microsoft Teams and were now providing support to students. She indicated that additional support was provided via LRC staff, that there continued to be one-to-one mentoring and that the IT department was doing what they could to support this work, as were several other teams.

Mr Stanley noted that the student feedback regarding campus closures and online support had been very positive. Mr Bodger extended his thanks to the staff who had achieved so much, particularly at a time when they were worried about their own families and their health. He noted that the students must also be very grateful for the continuation of their studies and the support they were receiving, and he highlighted that the College was giving students hope that there was light at the end of the tunnel.

b) Feedback on the College from the ETI Inspection carried out during the week commencing 2nd March 2020

The Chair stated that it had been her privilege to represent the Governing Body during the Inspectorate Evaluation and to attend the oral feedback, given on 6th March. She indicated that, at this juncture, she would hand over to the members of the senior leadership and she noted her desire that there be no downplaying of the praise which the senior team had received during the oral feedback.

The Principal informed the Committee that the ETI had not been in a position to engage with schools, for a significant period of time due to industrial action. ETI had carried out inspections of Work Based Learning within FE colleges in recent years but had not inspected FE provision. They had wished to acknowledge the progress made in FE and wanted to carry out an evaluation of FE level provision across the sector in relation to best practice. He remarked that it would not have been possible for the ETI to review the College’s entire provision and that the key focus of the Inspectorate Evaluation had been on a part of the Level 3 provision. The Principal indicated that the Covid-10 pandemic was impacting on the ETI’s ability to complete the full sectoral review and it was not yet possible to ascertain if the Inspectorate Evaluation of the two remaining colleges, Belfast Met and NRC, would be completed. He noted that this could also impact on the ETI’s ability to publish a consolidated report. He remarked that a written report on the College would be provided in due course but that it would be for the College only and could not be made public.

The Principal observed that the report which had been circulated as part of the meeting papers was the derived from the notes taken by the College staff during the Inspectorate Evaluation feedback. He indicated that it had been the best organised inspection by ETI that he had



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experienced and that Ms Gillian McCoy, who had led the inspection team, had been outstanding, that she was very thorough, well-organised and that she had kept the inspectors focused on the objectives of the evaluation.

The Principal informed the meeting that a booklet of best practice had been prepared, by the Director of C&IS with the support of the curriculum teams and the Learning Academy, for the inspectorate team, which had been greatly appreciated. He indicated that the two Heads of Quality, Excellence and Development, Mrs Miller and Mrs Henderson along with Mr Noel O’Hare the Head of Business Transformation, had interfaced with the inspectorate and had provided significant amounts of information to the inspectorate team in advance of the Inspectorate Evaluation. He noted that there had been a complete team effort throughout the College and that everyone had played a role in showcasing what the SERC was doing. He commented that he was very proud that the College had received the acknowledgement from the ETI that it had.

The Director of C&IS remarked that, from the outset, the College had addressed the purpose of the evaluation and had been informed that SERC had been the only college to do so; highlighting the work the College was carrying out and not merely laying out its plans. He informed the meeting that SERC’s work on project-based learning, and enterprise and entrepreneurship, had transformed the inspectorate team’s perspective on learning. He noted that the approach taken by the College in reassuring staff in advance of the inspection had meant there was very little concern regarding the process. As a result, the staff had been able to comfortably able to demonstrate normal practice, which had rung true with the inspectorate team. He observed that the inspectorate had been concerned regarding project-based learning following its review of SWC but that there was a significant, positive, change in the inspectorate team’s perspective after its evaluation of SERC.



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The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that the feedback had been wonderful, even from the corporate side of the College. She noted that the inspectorate team had been able to see what happened daily, including corporate staff’s work with students and teaching teams. She remarked that it had been lovely to be in the room to hear such positive feedback. She observed that the role staff had played, their enthusiasm and their dedication during the Inspectorate Evaluation, was as it normally would be. She indicated that she was proud to be part of an organisation like SERC.

The Chair indicated that the report was very comprehensive and she thanked the senior leadership for producing it. However, she had additional points she wished to highlight, from her own notes taken during the Inspectorate Evaluation and oral feedback. She stated that it had been highlighted that the College was demonstrating best practice across a range of subject areas, there was a high degree of confidence that the key focus was on learning and there was effective planning and delivery for learning. She reported that the inspectorate team had described the care and welfare of students as highly effective, coherent, respectful, supportive and appropriate. With respect to the monitoring of safeguarding by the Governing Body, the inspectorate team had praise to give and they spoke about the excellent relationships with external agencies in support of those in need. She informed the meeting that the inspectorate team had referred to the monitoring of Cause for Concern and had referred to the lead safeguarding team as highly effective. There had been confirmation that there was a resilient and compliant framework for the safeguarding and care of all in the College

The Chair reiterated that the inspectorate team had used the word ‘excellent’ seven times during the course of the feedback session, in relation to how data was used across the College, in terms of leadership and management across the College, the way in which strategy and operation were cohesively linked, the clear strategy from the top and the clear vision being enacted. She observed that the inspectorate team had encountered difficulties in finding areas for



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improvement but that the two areas which had been identified were sectoral and not related to SERC as in individual college. She invited the Committee members to ask questions or make comments, should they wish to do so.

Mr Corbett remarked that the inspectorate team had come in with a positive attitude and he was pleased with the final outcome. Mrs Fraser commented that the teaching staff were to be applauded but it was important to recognise the contribution of the support staff and the students as well. The Temporary Chair indicated his praise for everyone involved. He remarked that he had been at the Lisburn College campus during the week preceding the Inspectorate Evaluation and he had seen the significant amount of work being undertaken. He thanked the Chair for the work she had carried out and the time she had spent with the CMT and staff in preparation for, and during, the Inspectorate Evaluation. The Temporary Chair noted his disappointment that the ETI was unlikely to be able to complete the full sectoral evaluation, and that the ETI’s published report would have been very beneficial to the College from the perspective of marketing, and working with employers and others in the community. He asked if any of the reports or feedback received by the College could be used for these purposes. The Principal replied that the College could not publish any of this information, either from its own notes or anything received from the ETI. He anticipated that there would be no overarching report produced by the ETI, as it had been unable to complete an evaluation of two of the colleges, and was unlikely to be in a position to do so in a timely way.

Mr Mackell remarked that it was unfortunate that the College would not be able to publicise the very positive results of the Inspectorate Evaluation. He commented on the breadth of success across many areas of the College, in particular, the care and welfare, good practice and safeguarding and the range of services and supports offered by SERC in addition to the learning opportunities.



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Professor Woodside indicated that, if the feedback had been in relation to a primary school, it would have been noted as ‘beyond excellent’ in his experience, and that the staff should be complimented. He concurred that it was disappointing the College could not publicise the high standard it had achieved in the Inspectorate Evaluation but he understood the constraints which applied. He noted the comment that work experience needed to be developed, particularly for engineering and construction, which he believed needed to be considered further. He also noted the reference to the students of the College having the opportunity to develop and practice enterprise and entrepreneurial skills, which was excellent.

Mr Pollard asked if there was a plan in place for the colleges to come together to share best practice following completion of the Inspectorate Evaluation. The Principal indicated that this was the goal but the fact that there was not currently a sectoral report, and one might not be produced, could impact on this initiative.

Mr Parfitt remarked that the report was extremely positive and it was great to see that the Inspectorate Evaluation had been so successful. Mr Stanley commented that, from a student perspective, the inspection had been a very positive experience and that the inspectorate team had been polite and really interested in the students and their experiences.

The Director of C&IS thanked the Chair and the Education Committee for the work they had done in relation to engaging with the ETI and he noted the importance of the visibility of the link from the operational side of the College to the Governing Body.

The Chair observed that it was important for the Governing Body to identify ways to acknowledge the achievements of the College staff and students, prior to the next scheduled Governing Body meeting. She undertook to discuss the matter with the Temporary Chair.

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Action Point: The Chair and the Temporary Chair to discuss ways of acknowledging the achievement of staff and students in relation to the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation, prior to the Governing Body meeting to be held on 27th April 2020.

c) Applications and Enrolments

The Director of C&IS apologised and informed the Committee that, due to the volume of work involved in moving the College online, setting up IT systems, arranging training and other matters, it had not been possible for him to provide the usual written report. He commenced his verbal update by noting that the College was on track to meet ERC targets in relation to full-time enrolments. He informed the meeting that applications for the 2020/2021 academic year were a significant concern at present, and the College’s applications were approximately 300 below where they had stood at the same time last year. He indicated that emails had been circulated to staff to identify ways to increase engagement. He noted that students had been primarily focused on their studies during the previous couple of weeks and that many of these students would be considering moving up to a Level 3 qualification, or higher, for the next academic year. He remarked that the decrease had started in the past couple of weeks. He noted that work on engaging with these students, and getting them to complete their online applications, would continue for another week before the Easter break took place.

The Director of C&IS observed that the online applications system was the College’s own and that would continue to be delays in implementation of the STS system due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The Chair noted that the update highlighted the issues the College would face, moving into the next academic year. She observed that she had already discussed the matter with the Principal, particularly in relation to the implications that universities and colleges taking in so many unconditional offers. She asked if the Principal had any comments in relation to the



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impact of awarding grades at GCSE, AS and A Level, and the implications it was likely to have for FE.

The Principal informed the meeting that a draft letter, from the principals of the six FE colleges, was in the process of being uploaded to the Team Site, which he wished to present to the Committee. In the interim he indicated that he would provide some background to the situation which had led to the letter being drafted.

The Principal noted that 70% of the academic year had been completed and it was highly unlikely that face-to-face classes would resume prior to the end of the school year. He indicated that the DE and CCEA had moved quickly with regard to addressing qualifications for GCSE, AS and A Levels and had stated that no pupils would be disadvantaged by the Covid-19 pandemic lockdown, and that all these pupils would obtain qualifications. He remarked that this had not happened for vocational qualifications. He stated that this was the single biggest risk factor to the students and to the College and it was due to the apparent lack of active or proactive work on the part of the DfE and the Regulator, the CCEA.

The Principal advised the Committee that the DfE Director of FE had indicated a Task and Finish group had been established to deal with this issue, and that the Director of C&IS and Mr Hegarty, his counterpart in Belfast Metropolitan College had been asked to join the group on behalf of the sector. However, there were no dates provided, there were no Terms of Reference for the group and there appeared to be no action being taken by the DfE. He reported that Justin Edwards, CEO of the CCEA had asked to meet with the Director of C&IS and Mr Hegarty the previous day. Subsequently, the DfE Director of FE had been informed that the meeting had taken place and she had stated that the meeting should not have happened, that the DfE were the policymakers, and that the Director of C&IS had no right to speak to the CCEA. The Principal

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remarked that no satisfactory answers had been provided by Mr Edwards. He stated that it was not acceptable for FE students to be treated differently to GCSE, AS and A Level students.

The Principal informed the meeting that the draft letter had been prepared by himself, the Director of C&IS and Mr Brian Doran, and was to be sent on behalf of the principals to Mr John Wilkinson, who was in charge of the qualifications element for DfE, Heather Cousins, the DfE Director of FE, and the Permanent Secretary. He believed the matter needed to be put on record as it was such a serious situation, where FE students could end up finishing the year with no qualifications, no mechanism for progression and even the possibility that they could be required to return to complete the course during the next academic year.

At the Chair’s invitation, the Principal read of the draft letter to the Committee. He noted that Mr Michael McAllister, Chair of the Principals’ Group, was to send the letter out. The Principal emphasised his frustration with the DfE and the CCEA. The Principal invited questions or comments from the Committee.

Mrs Fraser observed that the situation was completely unacceptable, that students should not be affected and impacted in this way and that universities certainly weren’t allowing their students to be affected in this manner. She noted that issues of this kind were a significant factor in the College’s consideration of becoming an awarding body. The Chair concurred and noted it was important that this matter was recorded in the minutes. The Temporary Chair concurred that it would support the College’s case for awarding body status, however, it did not resolve the current issue. He indicated his support for the letter being sent but emphasised that the Minister need to be engaged in this issue, in short order. He asked if the letter should contain reference to the matter being escalated if it was not addressed by the DfE by a certain date.

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The Temporary Chair noted that the letter would be sent to Mr Wilkinson in the first instance and he asked at what point the Minister should be contacted. The Principal noted that Governing Bodies had a route to the Permanent Secretary as well and time was marching away so rapidly that the sector would end up in a position where thousands of learners would end up with nothing, which was not acceptable. He stated that on 19th March schools had clarity as to the GCSE, AS and A Level qualifications. It was now two weeks later and the FE sector still did not have clarity. He asked how the colleges were supposed to keep students engaged after the impending Easter break when they did not have clarity as to what they were actually studying for.

The Temporary Chair asked if the Governing Bodies Chairs Group would be the appropriate forum in which to address the matter. The Chair indicated that Governing Bodies needed to support the Principals in making representation to the DfE. While there was no desire to antagonize the DfE the needs of the students had to come first. The Temporary Chair concurred and remarked that, if the Governing Bodies Chairs group made a similar representation following the letter from the Principals, it would appear to be an appropriate way to proceed.

The Chair proposed that the Committee was behind the Temporary Chair in bringing the matter to the Governing Bodies Chairs Group and supporting the Principal. She asked that the Committee members comment if they disagreed. It was noted that there were no dissenters and there was full Committee agreement on the proposed action.

Action Point (i): The Temporary Chair to bring the matter to the Governing Bodies Chair Group, with a view to drafting a letter to the DfE in support of the Principals’ letter.

Mrs Fraser noted her support of the Principal’s letter. Mr Mackell commented that the issues had been well outlined in the letter and that it was important to escalate the matter sooner

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rather than later. Professor Woodside indicated that he supported the letter completely. Mr Pollard remarked that the tone of the letter had been precisely as it should be, and that the place to talk about escalating to the Minister was via the Governing Bodies Chairs Group. He noted that the issue called into question the governance of vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland.

The Director of C&IS observed that he had met with the Regulator at their request. He remarked that they had indicated Wales had moved ahead of England in relation to the issue of vocational qualifications and the question of why a similar action had not been taken in Northern Ireland had been put to the Regulator. He remarked that the paper which had been prepared for the Regulator had been written after analysis of all awarding organisations that the colleges dealt with and the issues currently being encountered in relation to assessments and had also provided solutions for these issues.

The Principal undertook to provide an update at the Governing Body meeting to be held on 27th April and to provide updates to the Committee by email, as appropriate.

Action Point (ii): The Principal to provide an update on the correspondence between the Principals’ Group and the DfE, and any progress in relation to FE qualifications at the next meeting of the Governing Body, and to provide updates by email to the Committee, where appropriate.

Returning to the topic of the STS project and the new learner management system, EBS, the Director of C&IS noted that the board had met on the preceding Friday and there were a number of options circulated. He informed the meeting that Option 2 was the one which had been taken forward. He explained that this entailed a limited approach whereby parts of the new system would go live in September 2020, with other parts deferred to January 2021. However, this was

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	<p>subject to review on a four-weekly basis and there was a possibility the dates might be pushed back even further.</p> <p>The Director of C&IS noted that it was highly likely that Traineeships would not commence in September 2020 and would be deferred. He explained that with the pre-traineeship Level 1.5 which had been discussed previously, the DfE needed to go out to tender. As it was not possible for the tendering process to be completed at the current time, this was almost certain to prevent Traineeships being introduced for the coming academic year.</p> <p>The Principal noted that he wished to discuss Traineeships under Any Other Business.</p>
6.	<p>Higher Education-For Information</p> <p>a) HE Review Board Minutes of the Meeting held on 11th March 2020</p> <p>The HE Review Board Minutes were duly noted by the Committee and taken as read.</p>
7.	<p>Policies Review Schedule</p> <p>a) Safeguarding Policy</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S indicated that the Safeguarding Policy which had been tabled was a new, sectoral policy. She noted that it had been developed from the College’s existing Safeguarding Policy but that as a new sectoral policy it still required approval.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Agreed: Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Safeguarding Policy, as tabled be approved by the Committee and that it be recommended for approval and adoption by the Governing Body.</p> <p>Proposed by: Carolyn King</p> <p>Seconded by: Karen Fraser</p> </div>

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8.	<p>Items for Information</p> <p>a) Safeguarding, Care and Wellbeing Report</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S noted that the College was beginning to see Cause for Concern reports coming in again. She indicated that the student counselling service was still available and the students could also contact the nurse via email if they needed support.</p> <p>With respect to the matters which had been raised at the previous meeting concerning mental health, she remarked that the College saw the resilience framework as addressing primarily mental health issues. She noted that some work had been carried out, as reflected in the report, but that due to the Covid-19 pandemic it had not been possible to do any more.</p> <p>The Chair noted that she had discussed a four-point plan with the Director of SPQ&S, with respect to the issues raised at the last meeting, particularly those raised by Mr Pollard. She indicated that a way forward had been agreed but that amendments had needed to be made with respect to what could and what could not be done, in light of the wider issues created by Covid-19. She commented that she had been in contact with Mr Pollard regarding the changes to the agreed plan. Mr Pollard agreed that there were more pressing priorities at this time and the matter could be revisited again in due course. The Chair indicated that the matter would not be forgotten; the Director of SPQ&S remarked that research would continue when things settled down.</p> <p>Mr Mackell asked how causes for concern were currently being raised. The Director of SPQ&S replied that the application was still working and that tutors could still raise causes for concern in the same way that they always had, and the safeguarding leads were still available. Additionally, she indicated that students could raise issues themselves and that there were multiple ways</p>

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causes for concern could be raised. Mr Stanley asked how student loneliness and isolation was being addressed. The Principal noted that the College aimed to run classes at the timetabled hours while online. He observed that this facilitated putting a structure in students’ and lecturers’ days. He believed that this structure was helpful to mental health and enabled students to make contact with their friends and tutors at the same time.

The Chair asked Mr Stanley if there was any contact through the Students’ Union for the students at this time. Mr Stanley indicated that the Students’ Union had set up a Microsoft Teams chat to provide a place for class representatives to hold discussions and which also allowed students to talk to members of the Students’ Union and discuss any issues they might have. The Chair noted the importance of the support mechanisms, in light of the extraordinary circumstances, as it was expected that in society many social and mental health issues would arise.

9. Any other business**a) 14-19 Year Project**

The Principal informed the meeting that the 14-19 Year project had been suspended. He remarked that no real progress was being made and the team responsible for it appeared to be getting frustrated by the lack of movement. He noted that Richard Armstrong, who had been seconded to represent the Sector on the project team, would be returning to SERC and would be supporting the Director of SPQ&S for a period of time.

b) Traineeships

The Principal noted that the subject of Traineeships had been discussed at previous meetings and he provided the Committee with an overview of the process and progress to date. He

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informed the meeting that, even prior to the advent of Covid-19 there was insufficient time to carry out a procurement process for the Level 1 provision. As a result, the Traineeships programme had been put on hold and the TFS contract had been extended for one final year. He commented that the College could not advertise TFS in its prospectus as the Minister had not signed the matter off, and that this could be a small part of the reason why the application levels were lower. If the Minister did not sign off the matter in a timely manner it would have a further impact on the College’s applications.

The Principal indicated that work had already been underway in the College to produce a TFS prospectus and it could be put in place as soon as confirmation was received that TFS was still running. He commented that another saving grace was the fact that there had been an uplift in how TFS was funded so that it covered its costs. He noted his disappointment that yet again Traineeships were not moving forward as it was a distinctive product from what was delivered in schools, which would allow the FE colleges to differentiate themselves. He stated that deep reform was required and it was essential that there was funding available to allow that reform to take place, in addition to the funding that would be required for the considerable amount of CPD that lecturers across the sector would require.

Mr Pollard remarked that this issue raised questions, again, as to the governance of vocational education in Northern Ireland, with respect to the decision-making in the DfE. He asked if this was a matter which would be appropriate for the Chairs of the FE colleges to discuss and to bring to ministerial level. The Temporary Chair remarked that the absence of decision-making was an issue but the perception that FE was nowhere on the priority list was a significant concern. He noted that the futures of tens of thousands of students were in question and it was something the Minister needed to prioritise. He remarked that it was an issue that the Governing Body Chairs and the Principals may need to discuss. The Principal observed that the Minister was not necessarily being given all the information by civil servants. The Temporary Chair noted that it was the Minister’s responsibility to ask questions and make herself aware but he believed the

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	<p>civil servants should be given the opportunity to speak to her regarding the issues in FE and highlight that it should be a priority for her.</p> <p><i>At this juncture, Mr Pollard left the meeting.</i></p> <p>The Chair noted that the Staff Governor Report and the Student Governor Report had not been included on the agenda. She invited the Student and Staff Governors to raise any matters they wished to bring to the Committee’s attention.</p> <p>Mr Stanley indicated that he had no further matters to bring to the Committee’s attention.</p> <p>Mrs King informed the Committee that this was her last Education Committee meeting, as her term on the Governing Body would end on 10th April. She noted that she had enjoyed her time as a member of the Governing Body and the Committee. The Committee members thanked Mrs King for her contribution to the Governing Body and the Committee and noted that it had been a pleasure to work with her.</p> <p>No further business was discussed.</p>
	<p>Date and time of next meeting:</p> <p>It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 26th May 2020, at 17:30 via Skype Teleconference.</p>

The meeting concluded at 19:36