

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
 held on Tuesday, 22nd September 2020 at 17:30
 via Skype teleconference**

Item No	Item
1.	<p>Chair’s Business:</p> <p>a) Attendance and Apologies Present: Mrs H Reid, Mr K Webb (Principal/CEO), Mr G Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Mr J Mackell, Mrs K Fraser, Mr N Bodger, Prof A Woodside, Mr A Corbett, Mr J Lee</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”))), Ms S Woods (Temporary Secretary to the Governing Body), Mrs C Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body)</p> <p>Apologies: It was noted that Mr Pollard was unable to attend the meeting, and his apologies were duly conveyed to the Committee. It was further noted that Mr Stanley was no longer enrolled as a student with the College and was therefore no longer eligible to attend meetings of the Governing Body or its Committees.</p> <p>In the Chair: Mrs H Reid</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest Mr Pollard noted his standing conflict in relation to his wife’s employment in SERC’s Finance Department. The Temporary Chair noted that his wife was Finance Director for DfE. No further conflicts of interest were made in relation to the tabled agenda items.</p> <p>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 26th May 2020 The Chair invited members to review the minutes from the previous meeting. The Committee agreed the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px;"> <p>Agreed: That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26th May 2020, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the meeting of the Governing Body to be held on 28th September 2020. Proposed by: Mr Bodger Seconded by: Mrs Fraser</p> </div> <p>d) Terms of Reference Annual Review: The Chair noted that the Terms of Reference had undergone a significant review the previous year and that the Committee had been given the opportunity to review them prior to the meeting, with no concerns or issues being raised. Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Terms of Reference were fit for purpose and required no amendment at this time.</p>

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	<p>Agreed: That the Terms of Reference be approved and adopted, in their current format, and recommended for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body, to be held on 28th September 2020.</p> <p>Proposed by: Alan Woodside Seconded by: Andrew Corbett</p> <p>e) Date of Education Committee November Meeting: The Chair noted that the November meeting of the Committee had originally been scheduled to be held on the day following the Governing Body meeting. However, due to changes with respect to submission dates, it was now possible to move the meeting to a later date. She indicated that, following discussion with CMT, the next Education Committee meeting would be held on Tuesday, 24th November 2020.</p> <p>f) Chair’s Update: The Chair noted that all items, on which she had proposed to update the Committee, were included in the meeting Agenda.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p>a) Action Points from the meeting held on 26th May 2020 The Chair observed that all action points had either been completed or would be addressed during the course of the meeting.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Principal’s Business:</p> <p>a) Business Services Update: Activities during and post-lockdown: The Principal informed the meeting that Business Services had moved quickly, when the College moved online, to create a prospectus containing 32 courses. He noted that this number had been added to over the duration of the pandemic and lockdown. He remarked that SERC was responsible for approximately half of business engagement activities across the sector, if not more. The Temporary Chair commented that DfE was supporting businesses by completely funding the Skills Focus programme, which would remove the financial barrier for businesses. He noted that courses offered to staff who were furloughed were also eligible for free courses in order to upskill. The Principal observed that DfE was lobbying for an additional £300k for Skills Focus and Innovate Us.</p> <p>b) Verbal Update from the Principal and members of CMT: The Chair noted her thanks to the Principal, Director of C&IS and Director of SPQ&S for their communications prior to the return to on-site provision of educational services. She noted that there had been many workstreams and many actions taken as part of the preparation. She indicated that the Committee would be given the opportunity to ask the SMT any questions they wished following the</p>

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verbal update, and she noted that the Governors had been given the opportunity to visit the College campuses to see the changes that had been made, prior to campus re-opening.

The Principal commenced the verbal update by noting that the Committee was aware that on-site teaching had been suspended with effect from 16th March 2020, in advance of the introduction of lockdown on 23rd March 2020. He remarked that, as he had informed the College’s inspector, Gillian McCoy, SERC had never stopped teaching. He reported that significant work had been carried out in preparation for the return to campuses, headed by Mr Paddy McShane and Mr David Burleigh.

The Principal reported that over 4,500 screens had been manufactured, together with over 5,000 signs, and that more than 20,000 washable face masks had also been procured. He informed the meeting that work had continued over the summer and that preparations had begun in advance of receipt of direction from DfE regarding how the sector would move forward. He remarked that DfE had produced a framework which was in line with PHA guidance. He observed that students at the College ranged up to 94 years of age and that SMT had wanted to create a model which would allow for a seamless switch between in-person attendance, online participation and a combination of both. He noted that this would allow self-isolating and vulnerable/high-risk students to continue to participate in their courses. He remarked that additional CPD was being introduced to allow staff to hone the skills they had developed over the summer months.

Turning to the approach taken with regard to returning students to campuses, the Principal reported that first year students had attended the College during the week commencing 7th September 2020, with second and subsequent-year students returning the following week. He advised that the Cause for Concern app had been amended to allow students to report suspected Covid cases and that SOPs had been refined to allow monitoring of staff. He indicated that a weekly update was being circulated to staff and would also be circulated to the Governing Body. The Principal observed that there was a new modus operandi which allowed the College to deal with class groups, rather than year groups.

With reference to student support, the Principal informed the Committee that it was anticipated over 800 computers would be loaned to students for the coming year. He commended the College staff for their significant efforts over the preceding months, noting that it was a joy to see how well they had pulled together to ensure the best possible outcome for the students.

c) Governors’ Q&A Session:

The Chair commenced the Q&A session by noting that the Governors were aware of many issues that had been encountered in relation to examination results for the FE sector. She asked if there was any further information SMT wished to convey. The Director of C&IS indicated that the majority of students had been able to obtain their qualifications and that the number who had not been able to do so was quite small. He explained that there had continued to be issues in relation to subjects such as electrical and gas

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installation, which required a ‘license to practice’ test, and which needed to be carried out in a controlled environment. He indicated that staff had been completing assessments since the second week of August and it was expected that, ultimately, there would be very few students who were unable to complete their qualifications. He noted that there had also been issues for apprentices who had been placed on furlough or who had been made redundant and that the College was doing everything possible to support these students and facilitate their continuing education, where feasible to do so. He reported that the College was working with employers, following the government’s announcement regarding funding which had been made the previous week.

In response to a query from a member of the Committee, the Principal provided the meeting with details of the number of apprentices who had been furloughed, with respect to the College and the sector as a whole.

The Director of C&IS noted that he sat on the sectoral Task and Finish Group, and he outlined the actions the group had taken. He noted that the group had anticipated that the issues which had arisen due to the inaction of the Regulator and inconsistency from the awarding bodies were likely to continue into the current academic year. The group had then met with the awarding bodies, had achieved better traction, and was continuing to press hard in relation to its views on adaptive assessments. He remarked that a sectoral response was being prepared and would be submitted, although resistance from DfE and the Regulator had been encountered in the early stages.

The Chair remarked on the difference in social distancing requirements between schools and colleges and noted that this could have implications for the entitlement framework.

Prof Woodside asked what the procedure was in relation to staff and students testing positive for Covid and if everyone in the group or bubble would be put in quarantine. The Principal replied that there were a number of different scenarios. He explained that a new SOP had been created and that reporting was taking place via the Cause for Concern app. He remarked that, recently, a member of staff had been taken ill and that all students of that lecturer were now working online. He noted that there was no evidence that the member of staff had Covid but if they tested positive, appropriate action would be taken.

The Director of C&IS observed that a suite of induction modules had been developed for students, and these modules were being tracked to ensure they had been completed by each student. He noted that students could undertake these modules within 2 hours of logging on, whether on-campus or remotely.

The Temporary Chair remarked that there had been an appreciable amount of work completed. He queried if the College was benchmarking itself against other educational institutions. The Principal replied that schools were operating differently and that there had been instances where one or more entire year groups had needed to be sent home from a school. He remarked that it was unlikely a similar situation

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	<p>would develop in the College as 2-metre social distancing was being observed, together with the use of PPE and the ability to move wholly online. He noted that, while the College was looking at what other institutions were doing, he believed SERC was doing everything it could. The Temporary Chair commented that he believed this to be the case and he asked if comparisons were being made against other FE colleges, rather than schools. The Director of C&IS observed that there had been some direct talks with other FE colleges and that, for example, one college had not bought any screens or masks and did not have an online induction pack for students. He commented that the College had taken a ‘belt and braces’ approach and that the systems put in place for staff and students were finely tuned. The Principal opined that there was no perfect system and that the College was continuing to learn and adapt, and would continue to look at the actions being taken by other institutions to ascertain if it would enhance what the College was doing. He noted that the College continued to remain engaged with Health and Safety groups across the sector.</p> <p>Mr Corbett remarked on the lowering of standards in relation to academic qualifications. The Principal noted that there had been no similar change in relation to FE qualifications. He noted the concern that there had been grade inflation in academic qualifications but not in vocational qualifications. The Chair commented that this issue would need to continue to be monitored within the sector.</p> <p>The Chair asked if there were any particular issues to highlight in relation to the enrolment process, arising from the issues created due to the lowering of entry requirements and the increase in the number of places being made available in universities. The Director of SPQ&S noted that there had been a significant contribution made by non-teaching staff and that the logistics of coordinating enrolments across four campuses had been difficult. She noted that the issues created as a result of the exams debacle had meant that the enrolment period had needed to be extended, and that staff had been working on enrolments from mid-August. The Chair remarked that it was important to note the efforts of all staff in relation to this matter. She thanked the members of CMT for their update and participation in the Q&A session.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Correspondence:</p> <p>a) Correspondence from DfE re Annual Provider Review Update 2019/2020: The correspondence from DfE regarding the Annual Provider Review was duly noted and taken as read.</p> <p>b) Care to Learn (NI) Scheme Circular FE 07/20: The Care to Learn (NI) Scheme Circular FE 07/20 was duly noted and taken as read.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Social Inclusion:</p> <p>a) Special Educational Needs</p>

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At the Chair’s invitation, the Director of SPQ&S presented the report on Special Educational Needs. She commenced by noting that the report made particular reference to online requirements and she observed that learning support staff were being trained in Microsoft Teams to provide additional support. She remarked that student engagement was good and that, in some instances, engagement had improved online. She commented that each student was different and that the team members were developing and enhancing their skills mix both online and face-to-face.

The Director of SPQ&S reported that work had been carried out with respect to wider student-body engagement. She observed that there had been instances identified where students had been unwilling to admit they were socially isolated or had limited or no access to a computer. Mrs Fraser asked if an evaluation of the quality of online teaching had been carried out. The Director of SPQ&S replied that some areas had been evaluated and that there had been positive general feedback from students and parents regarding the structure and effectiveness of the online teaching. She remarked that lecturers and students had also benefitted from improved IT skills and collaborative work and that feedback from students indicated that they enjoyed the online and in-person teaching. The Director of C&IS noted that the College would continue to provide online training once the pandemic had run its course. He remarked that SERC had been planning to introduce a combined approach, even prior to lockdown, due to the benefits of digital engagement. He observed that it would give the College the ability to offer a wide range of disciplines more quickly than would have been the case with a purely face-to-face offering. He indicated that he would provide a note regarding special needs online support for the next Committee meeting.

b) Wellbeing and Resilience Framework:

The Director of SPQ&S presented the Wellbeing and Resilience Framework, noting that the Committee members would be familiar with the concept. She opined that, as set out in the first section of the paper, community partnerships would be stronger following the pandemic.

Turning to access to technology, the Director of SPQ&S remarked that digital poverty was evident across a lot of sectors. She commented that greater involvement and support from partners was expected. She noted the mentoring programme and observed that work was underway to identify the various levels involved.

The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that support for young adult carers was being addressed to provide more structured and specialized support. She indicated that updates would be provided as matters progressed through the year. She noted that the final section of the report outlined the work the Students’ Union planned to undertake, although it could be impacted if lockdown was reintroduced.

Prof Woodside asked if there were adequate staff to deal with an increase in Cause for Concern reports. The Director of SPQ&S replied that additional would be available from Campus managers and other

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	<p>safeguarding officers and that students could access mental health first-aiders online or on campus. Mr Mackell asked if there had been a reduction in the number of Cause for Concern reports due to being online. The Director of SPQ&S replied that the position was slightly different and that this matter would be discussed in detail later in the meeting.</p> <p>c) Engagement Update Report:</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S presented the Engagement Update Report. She commenced by noting that she had tried to maintain engagement through the lock down period. She observed that it had been difficult to reach and engage with communities at this time. She noted that the careers team had created a number of webinars which had received a significant amount of coverage and that they had found it easier to engage during lockdown. She indicated that members of the community voluntary sector had applied to undertaken Access Courses themselves , and the College was only now beginning to see applications from their clients. She remarked that there was further work to be done regarding videos on how to apply.</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S commented that the coffee mornings had been very successful and that the team was now reflecting on what had or had not worked, and a number of actions were being taken forward.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>College Strategic and Operational Activities:</p> <p>a) College Development Plan 2019/2020 Progress Report:</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that the College had largely met its targets. She noted that HE was the only area where the target was not met and the report represented data to the end of July. Mr Mackell commended the CMT for the significant amount of work they had carried out and not letting the pandemic have a negative impact. He noted the strategic importance for the Governing Body and the College.</p> <p>b) Update on College Development Plan 2020/2021:</p> <p>The Chair indicated that the submission date had been repeatedly postponed from its original date at the end of June. The Director of SPQ&S remarked that the template was slimmer than usual with generic aims for the sector. She noted that the tables had been provided by the DfE and that the College would insert the number of enrolments. She observed that SERC was still working through part-time enrolments and it was anticipated this would be completed and the CDP submitted to the department within the next two days. She commented that this was not the approach the College would normally want but the circumstances made it unavoidable. The Temporary Chair noted that the Governing Body had approved the submission on 29th June and there was no requirement for the Governing Body to review it further prior to submission.</p> <p>c) Applications and Enrolments:</p>

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	<p>The Director of C&IS informed the meeting that the introduction of the new EBS system had created a number of teething problems. He observed that it had been due to be introduced more than eighteen months previously but had been repeatedly delayed. He indicated that there had been problems in relation to data migration, timetabling and e-registers in the new system and that it was necessary for EBS to link with current systems. He reported that training staff had been another big part of the issues and that there had had further been issues with getting a functioning online enrolment and payment process. He commented that it was hoped these issues would be resolved in the coming weeks.</p> <p>With respect to FE enrolments, the Director of C&IS reported that numbers were slightly up on the previous year, which was remarkable given everything that had occurred during the year. He stated that numbers were down by 30. He noted that some students who would normally have come to SERC had instead gone to university but that, given the issues encountered over the past six months, the College had been relatively unscathed. He informed the Committee that TFS numbers were up by 50 to 60 students, with Apprenticeships NI numbers up approximately 60, with recruitment to continue through the year. He observed that other colleges had suffered significant reductions in enrolments and that in some cases the reductions were startling.</p> <p>The Chair requested that a review of HE in FE colleges be tabled at the November Committee meeting, particularly in light of the concerns raised regarding lowering of university entry requirements, Covid and the potential impact for the 2021/2022 academic year. The Principal indicated that a sectoral document was in the process of being created, which would continue to be worked on and refined throughout the year.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Action: A review of HE in FE colleges to be tabled at the November Education Committee meeting.</p> </div>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Items for Information:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">a) Safeguarding, Care and Wellbeing Report:</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S indicated that over the course of 2020 to date, there had been no significant changes. She observed that Cause for Concern reports had still come through and referrals had continued to be made. She informed the meeting that the counselling service was available online, throughout the day and that students no longer had to wait a week or more so that in some respects the process was operating more positively. She reported that Cause for Concern reports were being used to record possible Covid exposure. Mr Mackell remarked that it was beneficial to have an instant audit trail of engagement.</p>

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Mr Bodger asked if there was any increase in students’ stress levels, in light of Westminster’s on/off approach to Covid. The Director of SPQ&S indicated that, at present, this matter was not being reported via Cause for Concern. She stated that it had been reported during lockdown that the Students’ Union was taking a lot of calls from students who would not usually be as engaged with the Students’ Union. She commented that students had been feeling anxiety over the situation but benefitted from realizing they were not alone, and that this had given the rationale for the mentoring programme.

b) ETI Inspectorate Evaluation – Sectoral Report:

The Chair noted that the Committee had already received an oral presentation on the results of the ETI report but that it was beneficial to receive the written report from the ETI Inspectorate. The Principal observed that the College’s ETI inspector, Ms Gillian McCoy, had indicated that it was intended to produce an overarching report and attempt to do a comparison.

The Chair remarked that it was important to identify a way to recognise staff for such a positive evaluation and their significant contribution during the pandemic and lockdown. The Temporary Chair undertook to discuss the matter with CMT.

Action: The Temporary Chair to discuss possible ways to recognise staff contribution, to ETI Inspectorate Evaluation and pandemic-related work, with CMT.

c) NSS Survey Results:

The Director of SPQ&S noted that the results of the survey had been very positive in comparison with the other FE colleges, universities and the UK average and that the results were very good news for the College.

8. Any Other Business:

a) Interim QIP Process:

The Principal informed the meeting that the date for submission to DfE had been moved back from November 2020 to February 2021.

b) ETI District Inspectors:

The Principal indicated that the ETI District Inspector who had been responsible for the recent ETI Inspectorate Evaluation would be continuing as SERC’s inspector. He noted that this was a positive situation as Ms McCoy was very fair-minded.

At this juncture Messrs Corbett and Lee and Mrs McKee left the meeting. [19:22]



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12.	Confidential Matters: A separate note was taken for this item.
	Date and time of next meeting: It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 24 th November 2020, at 17:30 via Skype Teleconference or Microsoft Teams.

The meeting concluded at 19:44