

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Item No	Item
1.	<p>Chair’s Business:</p> <p>a) Attendance and Apologies</p> <p>Present: Mr K Webb (Principal/CEO), Mr G Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Mr J Mackell, Mrs K Fraser, Mr A Corbett, Mr J Lee, Miss M Richardson, Mr S Pollard, Mrs D O’Hare, Mr M Huddleston, Mr A McCrum, Mr D Stewart, Mr D Wilson, Mr D McConnell, Professor A Woodside, Ms M Corrigan</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”)), Mrs C Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mrs H Miller (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development), Mr W Greer (Chief Training & Contracts Officer), Ms E Flynn (Commercial Contracts Manager the “CMM”), Mr J Nixon (Head of School, School of Construction, Engineering Services and Skills for Work), Ms M Hickland (Deputy Head of School, School of Construction, Engineering Services and Skills for Work), Ms K Cochrane (Boardroom Apprentice)</p> <p>Apologies: None</p> <p>In the Chair: Mr Pollard</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest</p> <p>Mr Pollard declared his standing conflict of interest that his wife is employed at SERC in the payroll team.</p> <p>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 23rd March 2021.</p> <p>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>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
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Agreed: That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2021, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body.

Proposer: Andrew Corbett

Seconder: John Mackell

d) Chair’s Update:

At this juncture the Chair invited the Temporary Chair of the Governing Body to provide an update on the role of Chair and Vice Chair in the committee.

The Temporary Chair informed members that Mrs O’Hare had expressed an interest in the role of Vice Chair, and he recently met with her to discuss the role along with the Secretary and the current Vice Chair Mr Pollard. Mr Pollard has also advised that he is content to continue with the Chair’s role until his term ends on the Governing Body in December 2022. The Temporary Chair highlighted that as per the Standing Orders this is a decision for the committee members, and he was therefore seeking agreement on the proposal for the two roles.

Agreed: The committee agreed with the proposal for Mr Pollard to be elected as Committee Chair and Mrs O’Hare as Vice Chair of the committee

Proposer: Gareth Hetherington

Seconder: Alan Woodside

e) Q&A Session with CMT re Covid-19 Activities and Student Support

On the invitation of the Chair the Director of C&IS provided an update on Covid-19 related activity and he advised the main issue is still around qualifications, there are still a few outstanding issues with the awarding organisations particularly around grounds for appeal.

He advised that that as most of the organisations are English based there is still a lack of understanding that students in Northern Ireland are a month ahead in the academic year and that the lockdown restrictions were also extended in Northern Ireland by a number of weeks and students were not on campus when English students were in March.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

On a positive note, the local regulator has been helpful and have made improvements with City and Guilds for local circumstances and they put pressure on City & Guilds to recognise the difficulties still facing students in NI.

The Principal informed the committee that the Department have requested the College to conduct a trial on Lateral Flow Testing on campus and he invited the Director of SPQ&S to provide an update on the referral statistics for Covid-19 at this point. The Director advised that out of all staff and students there have been 151 positive cases, 25 of which are staff which is 1.6% of the overall SERC population. She highlighted that when this is compared to the number of cases within local councils the College is always maintaining below the population rate.

In terms of the Lateral Flow Testing the Director advised that a number of new processes are being set up to conduct the trial and this will entail testing two times per week for anyone coming into the building. She advised at this stage of the trial, uptake has been limited but this may be down to the actual test which is not very pleasant.

The further pilot scheme for on site testing is planned and will involve staff supervising tests so there is a level of training that needs to be conducted for staff. The pilot will give the College an idea of how many tests per hour can be done and the plan is that the pilot will run in the Lisburn campus for 4 weeks from mid-June.

The Principal moved on to advise that the two local universities had indicated that they would be offering students firm places in June ahead of the results period in August, however after detailed discussions with the Permanent Secretary offers will not be made. There has also been an acknowledgement that students may have gaps in their learning and skills after the physical absence from learning this year and there is a willingness for better collaboration between Universities and FE Colleges. In response the Senior Leaders Forum for HE has been established which is made up of the 6 Colleges and 3 local universities who will meet 3 times per year. The SLF will be strategic and mandated by working groups.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>The Temporary Chair enquired if the Forum is to primarily resolve Covid issues or if it will exist in the long term. The Principal advised that there is a need for this forum, and it has been crystalised because of the pandemic however the Department are keen to promote the tertiary sector in the longer term.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p align="center">a) Action Points from the meeting held on 23rd March 2021.</p> <p>The Chair advised that all actions had been completed.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Correspondence:</p> <p>There are no items of correspondence to note.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Whole College Response to Covid: Good Practice Guide</p> <p>The Director of C&IS directed members to the Good Practice Guide and advised that it was developed after a Know and Show session with staff, the Director had been so impressed by the quality of initiatives staff had been doing to address the impact of the pandemic that he had started to look at wider issues and the guide was born out of that.</p> <p>The Director advised members that the Guide will be published within the next few weeks and the Edge Foundation are keen to publish the document. He concluded that Colleges have been seeking advice on best practice and the document is a good way to share the information. It will also be shared with ETI and other relevant agencies.</p> <p>Ms Corrigan stated that this was an excellent piece of work especially the focus around mental health and keeping students connected.</p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>International Presentation on the College’s Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme</p> <p>On the invitation of the Chair, Ms Hickland presented an overview of the College’s involvement in the Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Ms Hickland explained that the awards scheme came about to enhance social and employability skills for students especially those with mild to moderate SEN. SERC became the first college in Northern Ireland to become a Licenced DofE Organisation.</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The committee were advised what benefits the scheme adds to the curriculum and the training involved for staff and examples were set out in terms of the numbers of students who have benefited including a testimonial from a Gold Award Student.

The Principal stated that from a management point of view he wanted to compliment Ms Hickland in her outstanding commitment to this project. He advised that her team have given their time to this project on a voluntary basis and they have enriched the lives of young people, particularly those young people who had been destined for poorer jobs and at one time been labelled as failures. He concluded that he couldn't be prouder to support her in her efforts during the project.

Professor Woodside complimented Ms Hickland on a tremendous job and advised that he had attended the first graduation ceremony and he was impressed by the number of students involved in the scheme. He advised that he had an opportunity to speak to students and their parents at the event and had seen first-hand how worthwhile the project had been. In response to a question from Professor Woodside, Ms Hickland confirmed that there are plans to utilise the Newcastle Campus for the scheme however with the current restrictions there are issues around transport, but she plans to utilise the campus as much as possible.

The Chair thanked Ms Hickland for her presentation to the committee and noted that the work is extremely impressive.

At this juncture the Chair advised Mr Nixon would provide the committee with a short presentation of the College's Construction Hub.

Mr Nixon addressed the committee and gave a detailed overview of the development of the Construction hub and explained its focus is to develop the curriculum for the Construction industry. He concluded the presentation by advising that further development and engagement is required to support the hubs particularly from the Department.

The Principal added that the Department are currently conducting a review of the hubs as the 6 currently in place do not cover the whole curriculum on offer within FE.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>The Chair commented that recent media coverage has highlighted the construction industry has been suffering as there is a shortage of skills, he enquired if the hubs will work collectively to respond to the needs of the industry. Mr Nixon advised that the number of students in SERC has been extremely successful, and the College has the largest number of apprentices in the Sector, he advised that lots of the apprentices have been working in the Republic of Ireland in response to a shortage of workers. The Chief Training & Contracts Officer advised that there has been a significant growth in the construction industry and the College has been engaging with employers to meet the demand. He advised the fact that the College is the hub for construction has been helpful.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Advanced Techs New Level 3</p> <p>The Principal directed members to the report that had been circulated in advance of the meeting and highlighted that it sets out the commitment from the Department to introduce a level 3 technical award, the first phase is planned for September 2021. The Chair commented that it is a good idea to band the qualifications together. The principal agreed and noted that it may aid the understanding of what a level 3 qualification is as it will become a main part of the level 3 provision.</p>
<p>Have</p>	<p>Employers</p> <p>a) Presentation on Business Services Intervention Programmes</p> <p>The Commercial Contracts Manager (CCM) presented an overview of the College’s Business Services provision, highlighting the Skills Intervention Programme (SIP) that was introduced to upskill furloughed workers or those at risk of redundancy during the pandemic. Members were advised that 36% of Sector funding was drawn down by SERC for the SIP and the CCM gave an overview of the courses offered to participants. She highlighted that it has been a successful and exciting year being involved with the SIP as it allowed the College to demonstrate the skills and capacity they could exercise. The Chair commented that the results of the SIP are very impressive as the rate of growth must have been difficult to manage.</p> <p>In response to a query from Mr Huddleston, the CCM confirmed that in terms of funding the College receives its standard share of Connected funding, however, there is underspend across the Sector and the team will always try to tap into it to deliver more programmes.</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
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	<p>The Chair thanked the CCM for her presentation and commended the brilliant work of the Business services team and their ambitious plans.</p> <p>b) TFS and apprentices update</p> <p>At the invitation of the Chair the Chief Training and Contracts officer provided an overview of the written paper provided to members to update them on TFS and apprentices. The CT&CO highlighted the last year has been one of growth in both TFS and apprentices, in construction and hospitality and catering work-based apprentices have been introduced and overall, in terms of financial performance TfS and App NI will come in ahead of budget.</p> <p>The Chair highlighted that there has been recent media coverage about the issues recruiting to some industry such as hospitality and enquired if this has been an issue for the College. The CT&CO advised that the introduction of work-based apprentices is much more suited to the needs of the employer and the College has been proactive in marketing this to employers.</p> <p>Mr Mackell enquired if those apprentices that were furloughed during the pandemic have been disadvantaged? The CT&CO confirmed that most of these students were back in their jobs, he highlighted that the disadvantage to most students has been around getting direction from the awarding bodies in order to complete the qualification. He stressed that this year is very much dependent on getting good guidance and flexibility from these organisations so that students are not disadvantaged.</p> <p>The Director of C&IS advised that most awarding organisations have been proactive in issuing guidance and any student that does not complete this Summer will do so in September.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Social Inclusion – For Information and Discussion:</p> <p>a) Engagement Update Report Update</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S highlighted some of the main points from the written report to the committee. She advised that there has been a focus on adult return learners and the College has been working in collaboration with local Councils on local planning. She highlighted that a Higher Education Open Evening will take place on 10th June in campus which is significant in attracting a new cohort after a year online. The Chair thanked the Director her the update and stated that this work is strategically significant and interesting to watch how it has been developing.</p>

<p>9.</p>	<p>College Development Plan</p> <p>a) Update on College Development Plan</p> <p>The Director of SPQS advised the committee that a commissioning note for the CDP 21/22 had not yet been received, however she would present a draft plan to the committee at their next meeting for review. She advised that in terms of meeting an October deadline for submission this will ensure the committee has sufficient time to consider the plan.</p> <p>b) Applications and Enrolments</p> <p>The Director of Curriculum & Information Services presented an overview of the current status of applications and enrolments, he directed members to the written report and highlighted the current application and enrolment figures. He advised that overall, it has been a good result for this academic year however HE numbers are down, and they are across Sector as there is an impact from universities making unconditional offers. The Director highlighted that the Open Evening for HE on 10th June will hopefully help increase the numbers for this year.</p> <p>Mr Mackell enquired if the College is still planning to deliver some of the class online and part on campus. The Director confirmed that the intended plan from September 2021 is to deliver some classes online as there are advantages in using digital technology especially for certain categories of students like young mothers. He stressed that the College has been cautious in planning a return to Campus as no one knows what September will look like and the College is focussed on the best learning experience for students.</p> <p>c) FE Sector Activity-Report on Retention, Achievement and Success</p> <p>The Principal asked members to note the written report.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Higher Education:</p> <p>a) Centre Determined Grade Policy</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S highlighted this policy had been approved by the Governing Body and has been included on the agenda as a matter of process.</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 25th May 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

11.	<p>Items for Information:</p> <p>a) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Report</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S directed members to the written report and highlighted that the number of Cause for Concern referrals has decreased however this may be attributed to the fact that all students have not returned to Campus, she advised that many of the referrals coming through are often serious in nature. The Director noted that SERC were the first College in Northern Ireland to be awarded the Quality Standard in Carer Support (QSCS) by the Carers Federation. In terms of support for Carers the Director advised that the support is being offered but staff do have to be discreet as students often do not want it highlighted that they are a carer. They are being directed to financial support and counselling where possible. The Chair thanked the Director for the update and noted it is good to see the support in place for carers.</p>
12.	<p>Policies for Review/Approval:</p> <p>There are no policies for review.</p>
13.	<p>Any Other Business:</p> <p>No other business was discussed.</p>
14.	<p>Confidential</p> <p>A separate note was taken for this item.</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, 21st September 2021, at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference.</p>

The meeting was concluded at 7.43pm