

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 24th November 2020 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

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, Miss M Richardson</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)</p> <p>Apologies: It was noted that Mr Pollard was unable to attend the meeting, and his apologies were duly conveyed to the Committee.</p> <p>In the Chair: Mrs H Reid</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest 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 22nd September 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 22nd September 2020, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body. Proposed by: Andrew Corbett Seconded by: John Mackell</p> </div> <p>d) Chair’s Update: The Chair noted that the majority of items were included in the meeting Agenda. However, there was one item which she wished to bring to the Committee’s attention. She reported that Ms Stefanie Campbell had received an award in the Pearson Teacher of the Year Awards. The Principal noted that Ms Campbell was the Deputy Head of the Learning Academy and had won gold in the UK Digital Innovator of the Year category. He observed that the award was an outstanding accolade for Ms Campbell and for the College and that staff and students were very happy for her.</p>

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The Chair noted the congratulations of the Committee and indicated that she would liaise with the Governing Body Secretary to draft a note of congratulations to Ms Campbell.

Action: A note of congratulations to Ms Campbell to be drafted by the Chair and the GB Secretary.

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

The Chair advised that members of CMT had kindly agreed to attend the current meeting to provide an update regarding the College’s activities during the pandemic, with an emphasis on Student support. She invited members of the Committee to raise any questions they might have.

Mr Bodger asked if there was any information on how the College was performing in relation to the other colleges and similar institutions on the UK mainland. The Principal replied that there was no comparison information regarding mainland-based colleges but that the DfE was collecting information on Covid-19 statistics from the Northern Ireland colleges on a two-weekly basis. He commented that, reflecting on the catchment areas for each of the College’s campuses, SERC’s levels appeared to be below those of the local communities and seemed to be falling. He opined that the measures the College had put in place had prevented SERC being a source of infection, and that staff and students were well protected while in the College.

Mrs Fraser asked if there was any information available with regard to assessments for the current academic year. The Director of C&IS indicated that he was a member of the DfE’s Task and Finish Group and the NI Communications Group and that,, local awarding bodies wanted to work with the colleges and were happy to accept the mitigations proposed by the colleges. He observed that the DfE had organised meetings but was continuing to focus on what had happened during the previous academic year. He reported that the difficulty was that the Regulator and the DfE were did not appear to support the decision to allow the Colleges to see that they could take the decision to allow the colleges to speak directly with the awarding bodies to progress matters. He noted that it had been confirmed that the Regulator had the authority to instruct awarding bodies to permit mitigations that related only to Northern Ireland.

The Director of C&IS commented that the DfE, the Minister and the Regulator should give clear instructions to awarding bodies to talk to the colleges regarding implementation of mitigation measures. The Director of C&IS advised that a feasibility study had been suggested but that this would take too long to complete to be of any benefit.

The Chair asked where liability would sit if there was an action against the colleges as a result of the inaction and lack of guidance. The Director of C&IS replied that the Regulator had carried out a review of the process implemented during the previous academic year, which the Regulator itself had been involved in. He noted that this was a clear conflict of interest and that the review had reflected the process had been successful, which was not the case. He believed that the liability would probably come to the colleges and he noted that the colleges had asked the DfE and the Regulator for action, which had been consistently refused. The

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Chair indicated that feedback on this matter would be provided to the Governing Body and that the stress being caused for students was both foreseeable and avoidable.

The Temporary Chair asked if there was any way the Committee or Governing Body could provide support. The Director of C&IS replied that, at the previous Task and Finish Group meeting, it had been made clear that the College had recorded the issue as a strategic risk and that it had been discussed in detail at the Audit Committee meetings. He noted that there was a potentially significant impact for the College if the matter was not resolved. He remarked that the Regulator could almost be deemed negligent for its inaction, despite being aware of the situation and the potential implications. The Chair commented that the students’ welfare and futures were at the core of the issue and that the College was continuing to do its best to reduce stress and provide all necessary support.

Mr Corbett reported that first year students in particular were finding the situation especially challenging. The Director of C&IS highlighted that over 700 computers had been loaned to students during lockdown and at the start of the new academic year. He noted that certain types of assessment were being banked to ensure there was sufficient evidence to allow students to achieve their qualifications. He commented that for some courses, for example hairdressing, it was not possible to carry out some assessments. He noted that some students, for example those on Access and Restart courses, required more social interaction and that the College was receiving requests to get back onto the campuses. He observed that SERC was doing its best to facilitate this, where possible and within guidelines, for students who were struggling with social isolation.

The Director of C&IS informed the meeting that SERC had met with the CBI, IoD and Chambers of Commerce with respect to enterprise and entrepreneurs and that these organisations had been highly impressed by the work the College had undertaken to create and facilitate more entrepreneurs. He indicated that a presentation had also been given to Invest NI on both Project-based Learning and generating more entrepreneurs which had likewise been well received. He noted that all organisations had offered their support and assistance.

2. Matters Arising:**a) Action Points from the meeting held on 22nd September 2020**

The Chair noted that the action point related to recognition of staff regarding the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation which had taken place the previous March. She observed that any ideas from the Governors regarding how to recognise staff in light of current restrictions would be gratefully received. She remarked that the other action point would be addressed during the course of the meeting.

Action: Consideration to be given by the Committee members on how to recognise staff contribution to the successful ETI Inspectorate Evaluation, with any suggestions to be communicated to the Chair.

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<p>3.</p>	<p>Correspondence:</p> <p>a) FE Colleges Commissioning Request for Fortnightly Reporting Positive Covid-19 Cases: The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that the DfE had requested figures regarding Covid-19 cases in the sector be submitted by each college every two weeks. She observed that these returns reflected the figures for students and staff who had tested positive for Covid-19. She noted that this information was also shared with staff and the Governing Body on a weekly basis.</p> <p>b) November 2020 CDP Progress Report Commissioning Memo: The Director of SPQ&S observed that the DfE’s Commissioning Memo had been received earlier that day and that the progress report was to be submitted to DfE by 11th December 2020. She noted that the progress report would be circulated to the Committee by email, for information, prior to submission to the DfE.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>Social Inclusion:</p> <p>a) Engagement Plan 2020/2021: At the Chair’s invitation, the Director of SPQ&S presented the Engagement Plan. She commenced by noting that the Engagement Plan for 2020/2021 was similar to those which would have been previously circulated to the Committee, but that SERC had needed to find completely new ways to engage due to current restrictions, and that the plan set out the College’s intentions for the coming months.</p> <p>With respect to digital engagement, the Director of SPQ&S observed that some students were having issues in relation to connectivity and that local councils had expressed an interest in resolving these issues in their localities. She reported that the College could not bid for the funds being made available from DfC, but that SERC was engaging with communities and the voluntary sector, whose members could apply for funding. She reported that separate conversations were being held to try to address the issues, even beyond the students, and the effect that social isolation was having on many people.</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S noted that SERC was looking to secure further funding, particularly with respect to areas of greater deprivation, and was working to identify new partners. She observed the increase in Access and Restart enrolments, and noted that this may be due to people being placed on furlough or made redundant. She noted that consideration was being given to doing Restart courses during the evening. She remarked that the programme would be aimed at those who felt their jobs were threatened or who had low or no qualifications.</p> <p>The Chair asked if there was any information available regarding redundancies due to Covid-19. The Director of SPQ&S replied that there had been an increase in numbers during October, when the furlough</p>

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	<p>scheme had been drawing to a close. She indicated that she would circulate the figures to the Committee following the meeting.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Action: Redundancy figures for the period of the pandemic to be circulated to the Committee.</p> </div>
<p>5.</p>	<p>College Development Plan:</p> <p>a) College Development Plan 2020/2021:</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S informed the meeting that, at the date of the previous Committee meeting, the figures had not been finalised but that the figures had now been sent to and agreed with the DfE. She noted that there were no substantive changes to the version which had been tabled at the previous meeting.</p> <p>b) Applications and Enrolments:</p> <p>The Director of C&IS informed the meeting that there were firmer figures in relation to full-time enrolments and that SERC’s figures were stable in comparison with other colleges. He noted that it would take some of the colleges years to recover from the impact of the pandemic. He observed that the College would continue to have new apprentices joining on a rolling basis and that more business engagement and upskilling opportunities would be implemented as and when appropriate. He reported that the new STS system was improving in relation to the information it could provide concerning enrolments.</p> <p>The Principal remarked that the apprenticeship enrolments would continue to increase during the year depending on the performance of the economy. He commented that it was likely there would be business closures and that it was the College’s intention to allow any apprentice who lost their job to complete their education where possible. He noted that SERC’s FTE figures were higher than they had been for 2019 whereas all the other colleges were in negative territory. He observed that the College had gone from being the 4th largest college to the 2nd largest college in respect of FTE enrolments for the current academic year and that SERC continued to go from strength to strength despite myriad challenges. The Director of C&IS commented that other colleges were not providing computer equipment to students and that those students often did not have the facility to engage online which was a further challenge for them. Professor Woodside believed that students could see that the College was supporting them and that the resultant word of mouth would be a positive for SERC.</p> <p>The Principal noted that he had received positive correspondence from the Principal of Wallace High School, keen to engage with SERC as she was concerned that her students were unable to obtain work experience and she did not believe they were receiving the best careers advice.</p>

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	<p>Returning to the topic of apprenticeships, the Principal noted that information regarding the government scheme had been provided too late and that the measures to support businesses in respect of applications and payments was had not been made available at the appropriate time.</p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Higher Education:</p> <p>a) Minutes of HE Board Meeting held on 14th October 2020: The minutes of the HE Board meeting held on 14th October 2020 were duly noted by the Committee and taken as read.</p> <p>b) HE in FE Colleges: The Principal informed the meeting that, during the previous academic year, the DfE had decided to carry out a review of HE provision in FE. He noted that the review had been deferred due to the pandemic but that in the previous two weeks the Minister had signed off a project to look at the review, with a timeline of approximately two years. He observed that no Terms of Reference had been provided as yet and there were a number of areas that were being considered for review. He indicated that the Principals’ Group was concerned about the lack of policy decision and coherence regarding HE in FE and had formed a group to address the matter. He reported that the rate of decrease was concerning and that unless positive remedial action was taken, and quickly, there would not be HE provision within FE in the coming years. He stated that the DfE had formed a board to oversee the review, but that only civil service officials were on the board, with an advisory group also being formed, which would consist of stakeholders from a variety of areas.</p> <p>Mrs Fraser asked if Higher Level Apprenticeships (‘HLAs’) needed to be underpinned by a Foundation Degree (‘FD’) rather than a technical qualification. The Principal replied that DfE officials have advised there was a policy which stated that HLAs should be delivered via FDs but that no evidence of this had as yet been provided. He noted that there were advantages and disadvantages to this approach and that Higher National Diplomas (‘HNDs’) could have modules which could not be provided through a FD. Professor Woodside asked if there was any way for the College or the sector to escalate the matter. The Principal replied that there had been no success in trying to get this approach changed, even though the sector had obtained support from industries such as the gas, fire and alarm industries, and that one matter the board had not indicated it would look at was the aim of HE in FE.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>Items for Information:</p> <p>a) Safeguarding, Care and Wellbeing Report: The Chair noted that Mr Pollard had raised a question in advance of the meeting, regarding the nature and volume of Cause for Concern (‘CFC’) referrals and if those referrals had been impacted as a result of the pandemic and move to online learning. He had further queried if there had been any effect on the</p>

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	<p>College’s ability to identify and support individuals. The Director of SPQ&S confirmed that the Cause for Concern mechanism had been used for Covid reporting alongside the usual CfC issues and as was apparent from the figures in the report, significant numbers of students were being referred and supported. She noted that, while it was not possible to guarantee some individuals were not falling through the cracks, she observed that case conferences were taking place where each cohort was discussed and any student who had not already been referred to pastoral care was identified and support provided. She added that some students were struggling, particularly in relation to the lack of the usual social aspects of college life. She indicated that while the numbers of non-Covid related CFCs were slightly down, account had to be taken of the fact that the usual on-campus issues, including bullying, disciplinary issues etc., were not occurring.</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S remarked that SERC Extra referrals were also included and reflected more normal levels of referral.. She observed that some of these referrals would result in a CFC report but that numbers were fairly consistent with previous years. She indicated that young adult carers were finding it difficult in the current environment and she noted that there was a new initiative in SERC to provide additional support for them and SERC staff were liaising with the SEHSCT to provide financial packages and that assistance from voluntary groups was also being leveraged to support them.</p> <p>Concluding her presentation, the Director of SPQ&S indicated that the College was endeavouring to make the report more holistic. She observed that every effort was being made to ensure no-one was missed, and although this could not be guaranteed, SERC were working hard to support students.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Policies For Review/Approval:</p> <p>a) Library/Learning Resource Centre Policy: The Chair noted that the Library/Learning Resource Centre Policy had been reviewed by CMT and that no changes had been made. The Committee duly noted the policy.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Any Other Business:</p> <p>No further Items of Business were raised.</p> <p><i>At this juncture Messrs Corbett and Lee, Dr Malone, Miss Richardson and Mrs McKee left the meeting. [19:01]</i></p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Confidential Matters:</p> <p>A separate note was taken for this item.</p>
	<p>Date and time of next meeting:</p>



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It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 26 th January 2021, at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference.
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The meeting concluded at 19:02

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