



## SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)

held on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February 2024 at 17:30, in Meeting Room D Floor, Lisburn Campus and via Microsoft Teams Videoconference

### 1. Chairs Business

#### a) Attendance and apologies

Present: Mr Ken Webb (Principal), Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body), Mr Darren Stewart, Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mrs Carolyn King, Mr Alan McCrum, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Andrew Corbett, Dr Daniel McConnell, Mr Michael McQuillan, Mr Mark Huddleston, Ms Vikki Pinkerton

In attendance: Mrs Heather McKee (Director of Strategic Planning, Quality & Support), Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Dr Michael Malone (Director of Curriculum & Information Services), Mrs Claire Henderson (Chief Officer Quality, Excellence and Development) Louise Watson (FE Director at Department for the Economy) Items 5 and 6 only, Mr Noel O’Hare (Deputy Chief Officer Quality, Excellence and Development) Item 6 only

Apologies: Ms Wilma Fee

In the Chair: Mrs O’Hare

#### b) Declarations of Conflict of Interests

The following conflict were declared:

- Mrs O’Hare advised she is employed by The Board of Governors of the Wallace High School (a NDPB) as Principal. The sponsor department for funding and development work and other applications is DENI supported by or delegated to the EA as appropriate. Is also current member of

the College Advisory Group (Education) CAFRE DAERA CAFRE offers level 2 to level 6 + qualification.

- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by CCMS whose sponsor department is DENI. She is a current member of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College.
- Mr McQuillan declared he is Chief Executive of Enterprise NI and a board member of Invest NI. No action was taken in relation to the declared conflicts.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts.

Before the main business of the meeting began the Chair welcomed the FE Director to the meeting and thanked her for her time. The Chair advised members that the purpose of the Director's attendance was to discuss ways SERC could help inform change and improvements in the Sector. She advised that the College has been trying to achieve on efficiencies and good practice, address weaknesses in system and ascertain how we can help in terms of the review of the Delivery Model work.

c) Minutes of Education Committee meeting, held on 21<sup>st</sup> November 2023

*Minutes previously issued to all members.*

The committee reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> November and agreed they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting. The minutes were agreed on the proposal of Alan McCrum and seconded by Danny McConnell.

## 2) Matters Arising

*Paper previously issued to all members.*

Members noted the actions points from the previous meeting would be addressed under items 5,6 and 7 on the agenda.

## 3) Correspondence

*Correspondence previously issued to all members.*

a) 10X Delivery Plan 2024/25 081223

Members were asked to note the enclosed correspondence. The Chair commented that the College had done a lot of work on providing this information to the Department.

b) FE Sector Activity Report

The Director of C&IS asked members to note the report and noted that it is a useful benchmark for the sector.

#### 4) College Development Plan

*Papers previously issued to all members.*

- a) College Development Plan Progress Report

Members were asked to note the enclosed report at 004a.

- b) Applications and Enrolments

The Director of C&IS presented the report at 004b and highlighted the key points for the current status of applications and enrolments. He advised that enrolment numbers are very promising for next year and the sector as a whole are hopeful this trend will continue to increase. In response to a query as to why there has been an increase, the Director advised that it seems to be word of mouth from current and past students recommended the College to their peers. He reminded members that the marketing budget has been significantly reduced and so the College heavily relies on recommendations, students have had a good experience in the College and that can be attributed to the innovative way which courses are delivered.

- c) Quality Improvement Plan Mid Cycle Update

#### 5) Update on SERC recommended areas for priority improvement

*Papers previously issued to all members.*

The Principal presented the paper enclosed at 005 and began by advising the paper was part of the Review of the Delivery Model SERC proposed to DfE capturing Best Practice and implementing it in a systematic way across the sector. In addition, SERC also proposed a number of priority areas for improvement.

The Principal highlighted the 14 areas of improvement recommended and the inclusion of a new area 'There should be legislation to make FE the statutory provider for skills'. The Chair of the Governing Body commented that in terms of flagship projects he would like to see legislation to enable the FE to become the statutory provider of skills and asked the FE Director is that anything that resonates with Department as an ambition?

The FE director advised that it is difficult to say as the Department need clear steer from the Minister for FE in his vision moving forward. She highlighted that it is clear the Ministers economic ambition is around access to good opportunities and becomes much more regionally balanced. She added that social inclusion is key to both of those. She concluded that legislation is a very specific mechanism, so it is difficult to comment on that.

## 6) SERC supporting Sector collaboration

*Papers previously issued to all members.*

1. Contribution to Sector Development
2. Traineeships
3. Development of Sector courses

The Principal began by advising the next 3 reports will highlight how SERC support collaboration and also how this work supports SERC recommended priorities for sector improvement.

The Director of C&IS presented the paper provided in the pack at 006a.1. He highlighted the support he and other SERC staff has provided to the Sector in various collaboration projects including the work the Head of Collaboration & Transformation Projects provides on traineeships. He further highlighted the work SERC have done that will contribute to the sector priority areas for improvement this includes curriculum development such as the development and implementation of T-Skills, working with CCEA to influence the development of the vocational and transversal skills qualifications for traineeship and the development of developed a new pedagogy model for the college and the FE sector.

In response to a question from the Chair of the GB on how well employers understand traineeships the Director advised that the Chair of the Skills council recently attended a meeting in the College and was very impressed with the work and noted that it was a unique programme in the FE sector. The Director added that employer understanding is vital, so those placements translate into employment.

In presenting the Draft Sector interim SER/QIP on traineeships at report 006.4, the Principal highlighted that previously each college had been writing the SER/QIP in isolation and the feedback only related to each individual and therefore there was practice of sharing the self-evaluation data.

As part of sharing best practice and development of traineeships, the Director of C&IS had convinced others to share their data for the first time. The Principal added that this was a brave move for the sector as it starkly puts where each College are in comparison to others and so to get this agreement was significant.

By having access to all the data, it has allowed us to have whole picture and look at what are the strengths and areas for improvement as a sector. The Director of C&IS highlighted a few areas that cause concerns for the sector for example essential skills had been a huge hurdle for students achieving traineeships.

The Chair noted that there were a few overarching themes and noted that in terms of the SER/QIP, if it is not adding value to what each college is doing then it makes much sense to review the whole process. She further highlighted that when colleges work together in a culture of a non-threatening environment, as it could be said these reports are creating a sharing culture, it might happen more routinely.

The FE Director advised that there are many channels that FE find into the Department and fundamentally she would like to explore the following with the sector:

Refining reporting, what a good performance framework looks like, breathing life into Partnership Agreements, College Development Plans and 10x department returns. She added that she would like to make these live real and interactive for people in order to drive a real performance sectoral.

The Director of FE further added that in terms of the Department they also need to review their own behaviour in terms of how they incentivise the colleges, are not intentionally pit each against other and that is something which needs to be stripped out internally along with a better performance framework.

In concluding this item, the Deputy Head of QED presented the tool (Power BI Report) developed by SERC that provides live information on courses, where courses can be searched by location as well as subject area.

There are significant capabilities that can flow from the development of this report and its further enhancement:

1. It can underpin the development of a sector curriculum plan.
2. It can support curriculum offer optimisation.
3. It can be developed to allow for a single FE application portal to be created where applicants can see all courses in their particular area of interest and the distance to the nearest course.
4. It can allow dynamic changes to be made to the offer throughout the year.

The FE Director commented that the demonstration had been very useful, and this was a powerful tool that sector need to think through and offer available to prospective students. She advised that the Department would be keen to take forward this project.

Action: SERC portal to be discussed with Department at February accountability meeting along with agenda item 7 on Reporting.

*At this juncture the FE Director left the meeting.*

## 7) Reporting

*Paper previously issued to all members.*

### a) Mapping of mandatory reporting

The Director of SPQS presented the data setting out the reporting requirements for the College to the department. She highlighted that there was significant duplication across the Department, and it was hard to quantify the number of staff hours that the College has to put into delivering this. She added that with so much bureaucracy there is little return for the College. Members enquired if there was a data map detailing where the information goes within the Department as staff may not realise the information is being requested by their colleagues for a different purpose. The Director advised that the team to which the data was reported was included on the spreadsheet. and added that she had been invited to the DfE Staff Away Day this week at the department and would be highlighting this issue as part of her presentation.

## 8) Higher Education/Further Education

The Director of SPQC advised that the next HE review Board meeting would take place on 20<sup>th</sup> March and the minutes would be presented to the committee for approval at the next meeting in April.

## 9) Items for Information

*Papers previously issued to all members.*

### a) Engagement Update Report and update on funded programmes

The Chair took the report as read at 009a and highlighted the impressive student engagement numbers since September 2023, the neurodiversity café and the work completed promoting the women's Step-Up programme. She added that it is evident there is diversity across the engagement work of the College.

### b) Safeguarding report

The Chair referred to the report at 009b and drew attention to the data provided on operation encompass, she noted there have been 25 notifications since September, this is useful information for the College to have about learners and demonstrates the partnership is working.

At this juncture Mr Hagen, Chair of the Audit committee, advised members that a recent review of Safeguarding by internal audit returned a limited assurance on the report. He explained that the reason was around process and the committee were very assured that the Safeguarding processes are robust, however he added that when he reviewed this data with significant student issues raised, it pails into insignificance. The excellent work of the College is evident in this report, he advised that audit committee did record their frustration about the outcome of the report but there was no movement on it. The Director of SPQS added that SERC's approach to Safeguarding had been recorded as an example of good practice within the report and unfortunately the priority 1 recommendation was mainly around HR processes not being articulated in the SOP. She reminded members of the audit committee that they had asked for information on how many risk management plans are currently in place in the College. It is currently 43, however this number is expected to increase given the complexity of health issues across the student body.

The Chair noted that the Education committee are assured by this regular report and from a governance perspective can clearly see the checks and balances in place across the College for the Safeguarding process.

**Action:** The internal audit review of Safeguarding will be highlighted to the Governing Body at their next meeting, specifically that no student was at risk in terms of safeguarding

## 10) Policies for review

- a) Interim Policy for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
- b) Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy

The Chair referred members to the policy papers at 010.a and 010.B. The Director of SPQS advised both policies had been reviewed and there were no substantive changes required therefore they are for noting.

## 11) Any other business

At this juncture the Student Governor, Ms Pinkerton presented the findings of the NUS-USI Cost of Living research report. She highlighted the data presented in the report particularly the SERC specific data.

The Student Governor drew attention to the support in SERC from the Student's Union in helping students and the free meals that have been available. Members noted that meals are being made available for students over the mid-term break to ensure that the service reaches those who need it.

She directed members to the data setting out that the overall report determined 84% of students in Northern Ireland said they have grappled with unprecedented financial stress during their studies. She added that it has been a decade since student finance has been reviewed and the thresholds would likely need to be amended.

**Action:** The Student's Union will be asked to seek additional support from NUS to assist students in the cost-of-living crisis.

## 12) Confidential Business

A separate note was taken for this item.

**No other business was discussed, and the Chair closed the meeting at 7.10pm.**