

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (GB)
held on Monday, 27th April 2020 at 17:30 (BST)
via Skype Teleconference**

Agenda Item 1: Chair's Business

a) Attendance and apologies for absences

Present:

Mr Gareth Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body)

Professor Alan Woodside

Mr Andrew Corbett (*items 1 to 7 only*)

Mrs Barbara Larkin

Mrs Heather Reid

Mr Steve Pollard

Mr John Mackell

Mrs Karen Fraser

Mr James Lee (*items 1 to 7 only*)

Mr Ken Webb (CEO/Principal)

Mr Dillon Stanley (*items 1 to 7 only*)

In Attendance:

Ms Sonja Woods (Temporary Secretary to the Governing Body)

Mr Tommy Martin (Chief Finance Officer ("CFO"))

Mr Paul Smyth (Chief Human Resources Officer ("CHRO"))

Mr Niall Parfitt (Boardroom Apprentice) (*items 1 to 7 only*)

Mrs Beverley Harrison (Director of FE, DfE) (*item 4 only*)

Apologies:

It was noted that Mr Bodger was unable to participate in the meeting and his apologies were duly conveyed to the Governing Body.

In the Chair:

Mr Hetherington

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b) Welcome to new Corporate Staff Governor

The Temporary extended a particular welcome to Mr Lee who was attending his first meeting as Corporate Staff Governor.

c) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest

The Temporary Chair invited members to declare any known or perceived conflicts of interests. Mr Pollard noted his standing conflict of interest, in relation to his wife's employment in the Finance Department of SERC. No other conflicts of interest were declared.

d) Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body held on 24th February 2020

The Governing Body reviewed the Minutes from the Meeting, held on 24th February 2020. Mrs Larkin noted that two sentences of the minutes, on page 13, were in the wrong section and this required amendment. Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the Meeting.

Agreed: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 24th February 2020 be approved and adopted, subject to incorporation of the requested amendment.

Proposed by: Heather Reid

Seconded by: Andrew Corbett

e) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings

The Temporary Chair brought the Governors' attention to the Schedule of Matters Arising from the previous Governing Body Meeting. He noted that Action Point 8, relating to Mental Health Strategy, had been started but in the current circumstances there was not sufficient staff availability to make significant progress. He remarked that work on research would continue where possible in the interim. Mr Pollard observed that the matter would be revisited as soon as possible.

It was noted that all other Action Points had either been completed or would be addressed during the course of the meeting.

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f) Governing Body Members Recruitment Update

The Temporary Chair advised that the DfE had postponed the interview process due to the pandemic and that there was no indication as to when it would be possible to resume the process. He undertook to speak to the Director of FE in the DfE to ascertain if it would be possible to hold the interviews online.

Action Point: The Temporary Chair to discuss holding Governing Body recruitment interviews online with the DfE Director of FE.

The Temporary Chair informed the meeting that the DfE had recently extended the terms of appointment for Mr Bodger and Mrs Reid to 31st January 2021.

g) Appointment of Vice-Chair to the Governing Body

The Temporary Chair informed the meeting that an expression of interest had been received from Professor Woodside for the position of Vice-Chair, to replace Mr Mackell who had been appointed Chair of the Audit Committee. Professor Woodside noted that he proposed to accept the role, if approved, until such time as new Governors were appointed to the Governing Body and sufficiently bedded-in to allow a new Vice-Chair to be appointed from their number.

Following due consideration, the Governing Body members agreed that Professor Woodside was a suitable candidate for the role and that his appointment be approved.

Agreed: That Professor Woodside be appointed Vice-Chair of the Governing Body, with immediate effect.

Proposed by: Heather Reid

Seconded by: Steve Pollard

Agenda Item 2: Correspondence

a) Letter from the Minister

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The Governing Body noted the letter from the Minister for the Department for the Economy, Mrs Diane Dodds, dated 10th April 2020. He observed that the Minister thanked the FE Colleges for their contribution during the current pandemic. The letter was taken as read and no questions were raised by the Governors.

At this juncture, Mrs Harrison joined the meeting (17:58)

The Temporary Chair noted that on this occasion Item 4 would precede Item 3 on the Agenda, to facilitate Mrs Harrison.

Agenda Item 4: Update from the Director of FE at the Department for the Economy

a) Update on Departmental View on Coronavirus and Impacts for Further Education

The Temporary Chair welcomed Mrs Harrison to the meeting and invited her to give her update to the Governing Body. Mrs Harrison commenced by thanking the executive team, supported by the Governing Body, on a number of matters including the transition to online learning. She noted that SERC had risen to the challenge and had set the standard for a number of the other colleges. She commented on the excellent Level 3 Inspectorate Evaluation result which had been achieved by the College.

Mrs Harrison provided an overview of how the sector had responded to the challenge of the pandemic, noting that, overall, the response had been largely positive. She observed that the DfE was continuing to make requests of the sector, often at short notice, and that the sector had generally been pulling out all the stops to meet these requests. She noted that the sector deserved praise and thanks, not only in relation to its work on virtual learning but also in respect of its support of vulnerable members of society as a result of its manufacture and donation of PPE to a number of organisations, as had been referenced in speeches made by the DfE Minister.

Referring to the future, Mrs Harrison observed that focus was turning to the near future in terms of what changes would be required and what the future would look like for the sector. She noted that discussions on this were in the early stages and that a working group would be established to address the matter.

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Turning to the Skills Strategy, Mrs Harrison commented that the landscape had changed due to the pandemic and that recovery for the economy had become the current key focus. As a result, the Skills Strategy would not go out for consultation in June, as planned, and that a move would instead be made to a Skills Recovery Plan for a period of twelve to eighteen months, initially. She observed that contact had already been made with relevant colleagues in the DfE to move the work forward and initial indications were that the focus of the plan would be around digital technologies, leadership and management and the DfE's response to businesses. She noted that work that had already been carried out with the FE sector in relation to Brexit and that some of this work would be used in conjunction with the business development group, and that the DfE would engage with the Principals going forward. She indicated that the first draft of the action plan was likely to be published within the coming weeks. The Temporary Chair noted that the College was happy to continue to engage with Graeme Wilkinson and to provide assistance going forward. He noted that the pandemic had impacted quite significantly and emphasised the digital space and leadership and management.

The Principal remarked on the wide range of online courses that were being offered to businesses and that the College looked forward to providing support to Skills Focus and Innovate Us. Mrs Harrison commented that a blended approach of online and face-to-face learning was likely to be the way forward. The Temporary Chair agreed that a move to greater online content was likely but that, particularly for manual tasks, there was no substitute for face-to-face interaction.

Turning to assessments and qualifications, Mrs Harrison referred to the Minister for DfE's announcements regarding BTEC and Essential Skills qualifications. She noted that this had been a challenge and that work which would normally have been carried out over six to nine months had instead been completed in a number of weeks. She indicated that there were still a number of steps to be taken and challenges to be overcome but that the journey had begun. She observed that there were concerns regarding other qualifications and that consultations would take place with Ofqual and the DfE's counterpart in England, and that there was also an outstanding piece of work related to qualifications that tested competence. She remarked that this work had been led by Jim Wilkinson supported by the Task and Finish group. The Temporary Chair recognised that it was a complex area but that it was important that FE students had the same confidence that GCSE/A Level students had in relation to their qualifications. Mrs Harrison noted that the work needed to be completed by the end of the academic year and that it was also essential to look forward to what the start of the next academic year would look like.

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With reference to the budget, the Temporary Chair noted that the indicative budget letter from Mrs Harrison had been received the previous week which had been circulated to the Governing Body. Mrs Harrison observed that £19 million had been allocated by the Executive earlier in the year for salaries, which had not been baselined. She remarked that the figure for rates would have to change due to pandemic-related rates reductions and that the colleges had been informed they would need to absorb any pay shortfall. However, the DfE would endeavour to bid for monies to cover this item. She informed the meeting that a bid for IT equipment to the Department for Finance had not been successful, but a further bid would be submitted for learners that did not have IT. She commented that further work was underway in relation to loss of revenue and that efforts were underway to ascertain the degree of revenue loss within the FE sector to date and probably to the end of August. She noted that the figures would not be completely accurate, but that money would be required to make up this shortfall. The Temporary Chair observed that there was a high level of uncertainty at present and that all government departments would need to be flexible from a financial perspective.

The Temporary Chair thanked Mrs Harrison for participating in the meeting.

At this juncture, Mrs Harrison left the meeting. (18:39)

Agenda Item 3: Chief Executive Officer's (CEO) Business

a) CEO's report

The Principal presented his written report to members, commencing with reference to applications and enrolments. He indicated that since the College had moved online and increased its presence via social media, application numbers had increased, from a negative 300 in comparison with the same point in 2019, to 300 above that point. He observed that even though the numbers were increasing the current situation was very dynamic and that an increasing number of young people were considering taking a gap year, which was a particular concern for universities. He noted the importance of turning applications into enrolments.

The Principal informed the meeting that he could now confirm that the TfS scheme had been extended for one final year. He noted that Traineeships would have been funded through Grant-in-Aid but that payments for TfS

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were based on a strict contractual situation, which was predicated on numbers of students. He indicated that a significant part of this was that students achieved qualifications and he stressed the importance of ensuring that students obtained their awards in a timely way.

With respect to the move online, the Principal observed that awarding of qualifications was the most significant risk with respect to the College and the sector as a whole. He indicated that it had been seven weeks since the issue had been raised but that CCEA had waited to see what approach Ofqual would take and the lack of timeliness was a concern. He noted that it had been made clear to students that it was important to continue to attend online classes and that the sector wanted to avoid a situation where students were unable to get their qualifications. He observed that awarding bodies appeared to be giving conflicting information and that the announcement from the Minister had only been a starting point. He provided the Governing Body with an overview of the issues which were being communicated to the Task and Finish group, issues which were being encountered in relation to the Regulator, and the proposed approach which the group believed would work for most students. The Governing Body noted the frustration and lack of clarity for students and the importance of ensuring that FE students were not disadvantaged relative to GCSE/A Level students, as well as the potential for reputational damage for the sector. The Temporary Chair observed that it was important for the sector to speak with one voice and to maintain a continuing dialogue.

Mrs Reid asked if CCEA had a Critical Incident Policy, particularly in relation to the assessments which sat outside the GCSE and A Level streams, and if it would be possible to see a copy of it. The Principal replied that there was an overarching regulatory body in terms of qualifications which had a contingency plan in the event that qualifications could not be awarded. However, it had not been adequate for the pandemic situation and that the framework for awards and appeals was still unknown.

The Principal informed the Governing Body that the College had begun to work through remote interviews for applicants and that a virtual Open Day would be held in May. He indicated that SERC was looking at the online work of the College and also considering possible future scenarios after the end of lockdown, including social distancing and the issues that would be encountered in relation to available space to facilitate social distancing. He noted that work on the student survey was continuing and that a detailed report would be provided to the

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Education Committee once it had been completed and compiled. He also noted that the annual staff survey was currently underway.

The Principal informed the meeting that the College had been cited by the Edge Foundation for best practice in project-based learning, and enterprise and entrepreneurship across the whole of the UK. The Temporary Chair noted that this reflected comments in the ETI Inspection Evaluation report, which would be covered later in the meeting and he acknowledged the achievements of students and staff in this area. He commented that students were likely to encounter more extreme challenges in the labour market over the coming months than could have been anticipated, and he noted that it would be critical to ensure that a suitable level of careers support would be available for students.

Agenda Item 5: Items for Approval

a) Safeguarding Policy (Sectoral)

With respect to the Safeguarding Policy, the Temporary Chair reported that the policy had been referred to the Education Committee for approval and now required formal approval by the Governing Body.

Agreed: Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Safeguarding Policy be approved and adopted by the Governing Body.

Proposed by: Steve Pollard

Seconded by: Alan Woodside

b) Education Committee Minutes from the Meeting held on 12th February 2020

Mrs Reid, in her capacity as Chair of the Education Committee, reported that the minutes of the meeting held on 12th February had been agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 31st March 2020.

Agreed: That the minutes of the Education Committee meeting held on 12th February 2020 be approved and adopted.

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Proposed by: Alan Woodside

Seconded by: Karen Fraser

c) Audit Committee Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd January 2020

Mr Mackell, in his capacity as the new Chair of the Audit Committee, informed the meeting that the minutes of the meeting of the Audit Committee, held on 22nd January 2020, had been agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 8th April 2020.

Agreed: That the minutes of the Audit Committee meeting held on 22nd January 2020 be approved and adopted.

Proposed by: Steve Pollard

Seconded by: John Mackell

d) Finance & General Purposes Minutes of Meeting held on 21st January 2020

Mrs Larkin, in her capacity as Chair of the Finance & General Purposes Committee, reported that the minutes of the meeting held on 21st January had been agreed as an accurate record of the meeting and had been approved by the Committee at its meeting on 7th April 2020.

Agreed: That the minutes of the Finance & General Purposes Committee meeting held on 21st January 2020 be approved and adopted.

Proposed by: Karen Fraser

Seconded by: Barbara Larkin

Agenda Item 6: Items for Information

a) Financial Governance Report

The Chief Finance Officer (“CFO”) commenced by referring to the budget letter, which Mrs Harrison had mentioned during her update to the Governing Body earlier in the meeting. He indicated that while additional funding had been received, more money was still required. He could not yet comment on what the implications

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were for SERC, until such time as the budgets were worked through, but that this should be completed in advance of the June F&GP Committee meeting. He emphasised that the fact the monies received were not baselined was a significant issue for SERC and the other colleges, as the pressures were primarily pay structure pressures which were often backdated pay awards. He noted that it was imperative that this funding be baselined and it was disappointing that it had not been but that the DfE appeared to be continuing to work to ensure that the funding would be baselined in future.

The CFO informed the Governing Body that the most recent matter to report was the financial forecast for the periods ending 31st March and 31st July 2020. He indicated that the forecast had been tabled and reviewed in detail at the most recent meeting of the Finance, General Purposes and Staffing Committee meeting, on 7th April 2020. He noted that, at that point, the expected budget overrun had been £60k but this figure had increased to £180k, which included a reduction in commercial income from the second half of March, offset by a reduction in payroll costs, and a deliberate overspend to cover estates maintenance and purchase of laptops. He advised that the DfE had approved both overspends.

With respect to the July year-end, the CFO noted that there was a piece of work underway to try to forecast the impact of lockdown on the sector so that additional funding could be requested. He indicated that SERC had initially estimated that up to £4.5 million of income would be at risk; £2.5 million related to TfS and HLAs and the remaining £2 million related to commercial income from the College's commercial outlets, Erasmus schemes and project funding. He noted that the figures had since been reviewed in detail at the recent IMPMS meetings, with the resulting estimate to be submitted to the DfE on 30th April, and that a bottom-line hit of approximately £750k was currently expected; up to £900k of core income, offset by reduced costs, and an additional £150k of project income. He remarked that the figure could increase or decrease slightly over the next couple of days as the analysis continued. The Principal noted that the College was comfortable with the figures and that they were significantly less than initially anticipated. He observed that Mrs Harrison had already raised the issue within the DfE and he expected that the College would be funded for any shortfall.

The CFO commented that budget holders had carried out significant work to contain spending and that the figure of £750k assumed TfS would continue for a further year at current levels but that full details had not been received from DfE as yet. He indicated that the College was looking into a potential claim with its insurers for

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business interruption. He noted that many insurers were refusing claims of this nature but that the College would submit a claim to try to mitigate the impact of the lockdown.

The Temporary Chair noted that the situation remained very fluid and changes were likely to continue. He asked that the Governing Body be kept updated if there were any substantial changes.

Action Point: The CFO to inform the Governing Body if there are any significant changes to the forecasted financial situation of the College and budgetary implications.

b) Internal Report on ETI Inspectorate Evaluation

The Principal noted that the Internal Report on the ETI Inspection Evaluation had been tabled at the Education Committee meeting held on 31st March. He indicated that he would be happy to take any questions the Governors might have. Mrs Reid indicated that she had been delighted with the excellent feedback across all areas of student life and she praised senior management for its work in this respect. She observed that the atmosphere during the evaluation had been very positive and that the Education Committee minutes from 31st March contained a detailed record of the meeting to complement the Internal Report. She noted that there had been subsequent discussions to identify ways to recognise the excellent feedback from ETI, both for students and staff and she wished to ensure that the congratulations of the Governing Body, to students and staff, was recorded in the minutes of this meeting. The Temporary Chair echoed Mrs Reid's comments and congratulations and noted that the matter would be addressed during the Any Other Business section of the Agenda.

The Principal remarked that he hoped to receive a report from ETI, for the College's information only. He noted that it would not be possible to publish this report and it appeared unlikely that the remaining two colleges would have their respective evaluations completed in the current or next academic year.

c) Staff Governors' Reports

The Temporary Chair noted the report which had been prepared by Mrs Carolyn King, which was taken as read.

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Mr Corbett indicated that current circumstances were difficult, and there had been concerns in relation to how online work and study would work out. However, he noted that the process appeared to be working well overall. He remarked that there had been concerns regarding accessibility for students, including issues with bandwidth but that the College had significantly supported students by providing equipment including peripherals such as wi-fi dongles. He commented that a report was compiled each day regarding students for whom the staff were concerned and that the support was greatly appreciated by students. He noted that he personally missed the face-to-face aspect of teaching, noting the importance of non-verbal cues, but that the students were, by and large, online and actively engaging in their studies.

The Temporary Chair noted remarked that it was important to acknowledge the additional stress working from home and the increased workload had created for teaching staff and he noted that the additional efforts staff were making was very much appreciated.

d) Student Governor's Report

Mr Stanley provided the Governing Body with an overview of the Student Union's activities, covering the period March and April 2020. He noted that the Students' Union had developed new ways to engage that would support students and allow for collaborative work with staff to ensure student needs were met. He indicated that the move online had led to the Students' Union using Microsoft Teams, including private channels for class representatives and a Health and Wellbeing channel which hosted twice-weekly sessions and provided interactive content including meditation and relaxation videos and tutorials. He observed that the Student Engagement team had delivered some Health and Wellbeing activities prior to lockdown and had also supported the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation.

Mr Stanley noted that nominations for Student Governor for the next academic year would also be managed via Microsoft Teams, using video and a virtual hustings session. He provided the Governing Body with an overview of the methods being employed online to encourage student involvement including social media and Microsoft Teams.

e) Audit Committee briefing on meeting held on 8th April 2020

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Mr Mackell, in his capacity as the new Chair of the Audit Committee, commenced his report on the committee meeting held on 8th April 2020 by noting that the meeting had been positive and productive and that there had been significant discussion regarding contingency work. He observed that it had been clear from the meeting that CMT had undertaken a significant amount of work in respect of moving online.

With respect to the arrangements regarding the replacement of the Internal Auditor, Mr Mackell indicated the matter would remain on the agenda for the committee's June meeting. He remarked that there was an item in relation to a GDPR review by Grant Thornton which remained outstanding but was due to be addressed during the June meeting. He observed that there were a number of recommendations which were of a sectoral nature that could not be completed at the present time but that otherwise there were no items of concern. He indicated that Grant Thornton had confirmed they could work remotely and could complete the required work and provide a report for the June Audit Committee meeting.

Mr Mackell commented that he hoped to round off the year with positive feedback from Grant Thornton. He observed that the feedback from the Accountability meeting had been positive, as had been expected. In conclusion, he noted his thanks to Mr Bodger for his work and significant contribution during his tenure as Chair of the Audit Committee.

f) Finance, General Purposes and Staffing Committee briefing on meeting held on 7th April 2020

Mrs Larkin, in her capacity as Chair of the Finance, General Purposes and Staffing (F & GP) Committee, provided an overview of the committee meeting, held on 7th April 2020. She noted that there were no significant items to bring to the Governing Body's attention. She observed that the only non-standard agenda items had been in relation to the impact of Coronavirus on finance and staffing, which were to be added to the agenda for the foreseeable future as ongoing matters. She noted that the budget figures had changed subsequent to that meeting and had been superseded by the figures quoted earlier in this meeting.

Mrs Larkin noted that, as Mr Bodger had stepped down as Chair of the Audit Committee, he would be moving to the F&FP Committee and that Mrs Fraser had agreed to move to the Audit Committee to ensure sufficient numbers remained on that committee, until such time as new Governors had been appointed.

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g) Education Committee briefing on meeting held on 31st March 2020

Mrs Reid, in her capacity as Chair of the Education Committee, noted that the draft minutes of the committee meeting on 31st March 2020 had been circulated for the Governing Body's review. She observed that the minutes would be reviewed and, if deemed appropriate, approved at the next meeting of the Education Committee on 26th May. She opined that the minutes, together with the Internal Report on the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation and the commentary during the course of the meeting should have provided the Governing Body with a clear overview of the most recent activities of the Education Committee and she invited questions or comments from the members.

h) Minutes of the Chair's Working Group meeting, held on 19th March 2020

The Temporary Chair provided the meeting with an overview of the Chair's Working Group meeting which had been held on 19th March 2020. No questions or comments were raised by the Governing Body and the minutes were duly noted.

7. Any Other Business

a) Acknowledgement of Staff re ETI Inspectorate Evaluation and moving SERC Online

The Temporary Chair indicated that the Governing Body wanted to explore ways to acknowledge staff contribution to the excellent results achieved both in relation to the ETI Inspectorate Evaluation and the move to operating online, which was an ongoing challenge for both students and staff. He observed that it was not proposed to discuss the matter at length, at the current time, but that it would be addressed when some level of normality returned. He encouraged the Governors to identify appropriate ways of acknowledging staff and invited them to forward any suggestions to Mrs Reid for consideration.

b) Letter from Carolyn King to the Governing Body

The Temporary Chair noted that Mrs King had forwarded a letter to the Governing Body, following the conclusion of her term as Corporate Staff Governor. He believed it was appropriate to formally acknowledge Mrs King's contribution to the Governing Body during the term of her appointment, noting that she had brought a very positive perspective to the Governing Body meetings and that it had been very beneficial to have her as a member

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of the Governing Body. He commented that he and the Governing Body as a whole wished her and her family the very best in the time ahead. Professor Woodside suggested that a letter be sent by the Governing Body to Mrs King to acknowledge its gratitude to her. The Temporary Chair concurred. Mrs Reid suggested that Mrs King be asked to remain in contact with the Governors.

No other business was discussed.

8. Confidential Business

At this juncture, Messrs Stanley, Parfitt, Corbett and Lee left the meeting. [20:22]

A separate note was taken for this item.

Date of next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled to take place on Monday, 29th June 2020, at 17:30 via Skype Teleconference, subject to lockdown restrictions remaining in place.

The meeting concluded at 20:30

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Temporary Chair of the Governing Body