

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

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 John Mackell, Mr Andrew Corbett, Mrs Barbara Larkin, Mr Steve Pollard, Mrs Karen Fraser, Mr James Lee, Mr Ken Webb (CEO/Principal), Miss Mollie Richardson, Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Darren Stewart, Dr Daniel McConnell, Mr Mark Huddleston, Ms Majella Corrigan

In Attendance:

Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr Tommy Martin (Chief Finance Officer (“CFO”)), Mr Paul Smyth (Chief HR Officer (“CHRO”)), Mrs Kathryn Cochrane (Boardroom Apprentice)

Apologies: None.

In the Chair:

Mr Hetherington.

The Temporary Chair extended a particular welcome to Ms Corrigan at her first Governing Body meeting.

b) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:

The Temporary Chair invited members to declare any known or perceived conflicts of interests. Ms Corrigan declared that she was a Council member of CCEA.

c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body held on 22nd February 2021:

The Governing Body reviewed the Minutes of the Meeting held on 22nd February 2021. Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the Meeting.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Agreed: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body, held on 22nd February 2021, be approved, and adopted.

Proposed by: Gareth Hetherington

Seconded by: Andrew Corbett

d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings:

It was noted that there were no Action Points arising from the previous meeting held on 22nd February 2021.

At this juncture the Temporary Chair advised that the Chair of the FGP Committee had sought volunteers for the current vacant position of Vice Chair of the Committee and the Chair’s role when her term comes to end in July, so far, no members have made contact to express an interest. The Temporary Chair made a plea to anyone interested in either of the roles to make contact as soon as possible to allow time for a handover with the current committee Chair.

Action Point: Members wishing to express an interest in the role of Chair or Vice Chair of the FGP committee should contact the Temporary Chair, FGP Chair or the Secretary as soon as possible

Agenda Item 2: Correspondence:

a) DfE update on CDP & budgeting timetable 2021/22

The Chief Finance Officer advised the correspondence confirms that an indicative Budget will be provided imminently to allow a Budget build which is the same approach adapted by the Department last year, a final Budget will be confirmed in October. The Temporary Chair enquired if there are any specific concerns regarding this process that the CFO would like to raise with members, in response he advised that he had no concerns other than the costs associated with Covid. However, discussions have already started with the Department and the Covid costs will be recognised.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Agenda Item 3: Principal and Chief Executive’s report:

On the invitation of the Temporary Chair the Principal provided a brief overview of his written report, the following points were highlighted:

- The Principal informed members that the Economy Minister had visited SERC earlier in the day and had spent time with some of the Marine Engineering students and the hair and beauty students, this was in light of the lifting of some restrictions that would allow students back on site to complete practical assessments.
- The Principal directed members to the feedback from the ETI District Inspector in relation to the Whole College Quality Improvement Plan/Self Evaluation Report. He highlighted that the College had achieved the highest rating possible, and he pointed out that not all Colleges are awarded this grade, the College staff put an immense amount of effort into the report to ensure the highest rating is achieved.
- The Temporary Chair enquired if there is any impact to the College on the extension of the report from February to November. The Principal advised the College will continue with the timeline as it has always been as the work needs to be completed to ensure excellent Quality standards continue and it will be done in a timely manner.
- Moving on the Principal advised that in addition to the staff and student achievements recorded in the written report, Paul Mercer, Deputy Head of School, School of Hospitality, Management and Tourism has been shortlisted for Pearson FE Lecturer of the Year. The Hospitality and Catering team had been shortlisted in The Times Educational Supplement FE award; the winners will be announced on 28th May.
- The Temporary Chair noted the fantastic achievement of all the recipients listed in the Principal’s report and asked that the Governing Body’s congratulations was formally noted and passed on to all.
- The Principal advised that in terms of a return to face-to-face learning, a paper was submitted to the NI Executive in mid-April to move the Sector to stage 2 of the plan as schools are currently at stage 3. The Principal emphasized it is imperative to get more students back on campus especially those that are completing practical assessments.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- However, the Executive have not moved to stage 2 as the Chief Medical Officer requested lateral flow testing was in place first, the rationale behind this, is that FE students have a different age profile to school students and the catchment area is much larger for the Colleges. The Principal informed members that he firmly believes that lateral flow testing should be carried out on campus starting in August for anyone coming into the College.
- Mr McCrum enquired how regularly lateral flow testing is expected to be done. The Principal confirmed that it will be twice weekly, however some students (and staff) are not in Campus twice a week and so they will need to provide evidence that they have had another test done outside of the College testing. The Principal advised that he has found that staff and students have been extremely receptive and engaged in the processes which have been put in place, there is also a culture of responsibility across the student body that would give assurances the guidelines will be followed.
- The Temporary Chair enquired if any guidance on Lateral Flow testing has been issued by the Department. The Principal advised there has not been so far, but that Queen’s University and Walsall College are currently carrying out internal testing which provides a good example of how it should be conducted. He advised that although there is a cost and organisational element to testing it is crucial that it is done in the right way.

At this juncture the Principal provided an update on the issue of assessments and Awarding Bodies, a brief discussion took place, and the following points were noted:

- The Principal began by advising members that there are still students who have not been able to complete practical assessments and the detail on what needs to be done for these assessments has still not been provided by the relevant awarding bodies. The Sector has been continually meeting with the awarding organisations as there is a risk of 3600 students not completing their qualifications which has been an extremely stressful and upsetting situation for the students and staff involved.
- Mrs O’Hare noted that the regulator has a responsibility to the students in Northern Ireland and enquired if there was a way in which they could be made aware how this is impacting on

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

students. The Principal advised that in FE the only course which is not offered in England is Essential Skills and so CCEA have decided to go along with what Ofqual have decided however as there are different timelines in NI compared to England this has been very unhelpful. The DfE Task and Finish led by Jim Wilkinson have been informed that this is not a satisfactory way forward for Northern Ireland. The Sector have also proposed simulating the practical assessment by making adjustments on courses that require a licence to practice however the awarding bodies are reluctant to relax the regulations around these assessments.

- Mrs O’Hare thanked the Principal for this update and noted that it clarifies the College is doing all that it can, however this is not a satisfactory outcome for young people and the awarding bodies need to do more to work with the Sector.
- The Temporary Chair enquired if there was any more the College could do or any support the Governing Body could give to make further progress. The Principal responded that the Sector has made its views very clear to the Minister and highlighted that some of these awarding organisations have simply ignored the Minister’s statement in February advising that there would be no examinations.
- The Department have tasked CCEA with carrying out a review and the Sector have highlighted that CCEA is conflicted and therefore have challenged this report.
- Mr Huddleston advised that the Governing Body need to be cognisant that CCEA are conflicted as an awarding body and the regulator. He advised that the Governing Body need to consider what support is given to the senior leadership team in the College as CCEA’s position is untenable.
- The Principal informed members the College has done all it can to take this issue forward positively in terms of maximising practical elements and banking evidence early in the year which the staff must be commended for on their efforts. He agreed with the comments that CCEA are very much conflicted in this matter and suggested that Northern Ireland should have its own awarding body for vocational and technical qualifications. He advised that if the Sector is always having to deal with 39 different organisations it will always be an English agenda and therefore is not in the best interests of students in NI.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- The Temporary Chair noted that the Governing Body has been advised of this issue previously and asked the Principal to keep members informed of any developments, he concluded the discussion by advising the Governing Body will provide support to the College any way it can to progress the matter.

The Principal concluded his report by providing members with an update on the 14-19 Strategy, he highlighted that an action plan has been proposed to both Ministers at DfE and Department of Education so that a longer-term strategy can be developed in the next NI Assembly mandate, this proposal will ensure that steps can be taken now on immediate actions. The Temporary Chair advised that this approach poses a risk in terms of slow progress in the next mandate if there is a change in Minister in either Department.

Mr Huddleston stated he was deeply concerned on the lack of progress on this strategy, and he felt this approach isn't helpful in terms of where it needs to go and will see a divide in young people, and some will be left behind. Ms Corrigan highlighted that a further challenge facing this piece of work is the proposed Review of Education which is likely aimed to be a catch all.

The Principal noted the other pressures and challenges and advised that despite this the work the College is in good shape.

Agenda Item 4: Items for Approval

a) Participation in the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme 2021/22

The Secretary advised that in order to meet the deadline for submission for the programme, Governors had indicated previously by email that they were content to continue with the programme for 2021/22 and a formal decision was required for the record.

Agreed: The Governing Body agreed to continue their participation in the Boardroom Apprentice Scheme for 21/22

Proposer: Gareth Hetherington

Seconder: Derek Wilson

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

b) Governing Body and Committee Schedule 2021/22

The Temporary Chair presented the schedule for approval and advised that management have reviewed the schedule to ensure that it meets the business requirements over the academic year 2021/22. He highlighted that the schedule has allocated meeting locations and he would hope that the Governing Body meetings can return to physical meetings in the next academic year. The Principal advised that this would be dependent on what stage the College is at in the NI Executive plans and a room would need to be large to accommodate all attendees and allow social distancing.

Agreed: The Governing Body reviewed and approved the GB Meeting and Committee Schedule 21/22

Proposer: Alan Woodside

Seconded: Deborah O’Hare

Action: The Governing Body will review the return to physical meetings at the next meeting June 2021

c) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 20th January 2021

Mr Mackell, Chair of the Audit Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mrs Fraser and seconded by Mr Lee.

d) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 26th January 2021

Mrs Reid, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Professor Woodside and seconded by Mr Huddleston.

e) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 19th January 2021

Mrs Larkin, Chair of the FGP Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr McCrum and seconded by Mr Corbett.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Agenda Item 5: Policies for Noting or Approval:

a) Fees Policy 22/23

The Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee presented the policy for approval, she advised that the committee had reviewed it at their recent meeting and were content to recommend it for adoption. She highlighted that the policy is presented for approval early so that it can be included in the marketing material such as the prospectus for the academic year 22/23. Members were advised that there is a proposed 3% increase in fees from the published fees schedule of 21/22, this is in line with the increase local universities made for 21/22.

In response to a query from Mr Stewart, the CFO advised that in the 3% fee increase the College has made every effort to strike a balance in terms of keeping fees simple and applying a blanket approach. He highlighted that in terms of cost of delivery for course the vast majority are the same and this is much more about what competitors in FE are doing and what the College can do for HE (in terms of restrictions set by the Department).

Mr Huddleston enquired if any consideration has been given to the proposed introduction of all age apprenticeships which is likely to have an impact on fees. The CFO advised that more thought is needed on this issue and he will revisit it next year.

Mr Mackell noted that as online delivery has been so successful and there are plans to incorporate blended learning into normal College life would the CFO expect any pushback from students on a fee increase if they felt they were not getting the full College experience? The CFO advised that consideration had been given to how online learning will be received, however the College believes that this is the right time to introduce a fee increase as all Colleges have financial hardship and have a responsibility to the public purse to ensure it is balanced. In terms of online learning the CFO advised

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

that students will be made very aware an element of their course may be delivered online and this will allow the student to make their decision based on the information provided at the time of making an application.

Agreed: The Fees Policy 22/23 was approved and adopted

Proposed by: Darren Stewart

Seconded by: Derek Wilson

b) Access to Information Policy

Mrs Larkin presented the policy for approval and advised the committee had been content to recommend it for adoption. She advised that minor changes had been made to the policy including the title, (which still needed to be amended in the main document) and it takes account of the College’s legal obligations in terms of the updated legislation.

Agreed: The Access to Information Policy was approved and adopted subject to the minor change being made to the title.

Proposed by: Barbara Larkin

Seconded by: Majella Corrigan

c) Student Carer Policy

The Vice-Chair of the Education Committee presented the policy for approval and advised that minor changes had been made to the policy, he provided a brief overview of the purpose of the policy and highlighted that the policy outlines the challenges faced by students who have substantial caring commitments. Ms Corrigan noted that she was heartened to see a policy like this coming through to support a vulnerable group.

Agreed: The Student Carer Policy was approved and adopted

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Proposer: Majella Corrigan

Seconder: Alan Woodside

d) Centre Determined Grades Summer 2021 Policy

The Temporary Chair asked members to note this policy had been circulated by email to meet the requested deadline and members had been given an opportunity to seek further information from members of the management team. The Policy was approved and submitted to CCEA by 23rd April as requested.

Agreed: The Centre Determined Grades Summer 2021 Policy was approved and adopted

Proposer: Gareth Hetherington

Seconder: James Lee

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Agenda Item 6: Items for Information:

a) Financial Governance Report:

In presenting the Financial Governance Report the CFO advised that it aims to set out the forecasted financial position as at both 31 March 2021(DfE year-end) and 31 July 2021(SERC year-end). The CFO highlighted that the current report shows the College’s expected financial performance for the year up to the end of March; and it’s forecast for the year ending July. The report outlines that financial performance is on target for the March year-end (to meet the approved Resource Allocation of £39,731k) and is on-target to meet the July yearend target of £40,451k.

The CFO advised that attention has turned to next year’s budget and his team have started a budget build that will tie into the indicative budget that the Department will issue to the College before the end of April. He advised that there is more work to be done on how Covid will impact the budget however, the Department have been engaging with the College in this work and a positive relationship has developed with them in progressing the work.

Mr Stewart enquired if the financial assumptions are similar across the Sector. In response the CFO advised that whilst there are some common themes there are some variants, for example the lateral flow testing model preferred by SERC will rely on G4S security staff, this model has not been adopted by all 6 Colleges. The CFO further advised that the Principal received the Sector returns as Chair of the Principal’s Group, the assumptions have been set and agreed by NIFON. The broad headline is that NIFON are trying to get as many common themes as possible but there will be variances.

The Principal confirmed that there are 4 scenarios which NIFON have put costing against, the information has been sent to the Department to try and put some markers down on Covid funding for next year.

b) Staff Governors’ Reports:

The Governing Body noted the written report provided by Mr Lee, Corporate Staff Governor.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Mr Corbett observed that the Governing Body have already been provided with updates on examinations and the requirements of awarding bodies by the principal. He advised that he would like to provide assurance to the governors on how staff will be awarding centre grades. He gave an overview of how the staff are working to assess students' work and on what an appropriate level of evidence is. He noted that staff are working to the dates set by awarding bodies and that SERC has put in additional layers of quality assurance to ensure compliance with all regulations. He further advised that grades for individual units are not required by Ofqual however the College have decided to record these unit assessments to calculate a final qualification grade.

c) Student Governor Report:

On the invitation of the Temporary Chair, the Student Governor, Mollie Richardson presented a verbal report on the recent activity with the Student's Union. She advised that the focus has remained very much on student support and wellbeing. The SU has been keeping a firm presence amongst the student body as more students return to campus to ensure that engagement is key.

The Student Governor advised that the Student elections have been held and Gemma Diamond has been elected as the next Student Governor, she will take up her post in October 2021.

d) Audit Committee briefing on meeting held on 31st March 2021:

Mr Mackell provided a brief overview of the business conducted at the recent meeting; the following points were noted:

- The committee reviewed an internal audit request by the Department to include a review of Hardship Fund and the administration of Covid payments, this is likely to be incorporated into the internal audit plan in September.
- RSM presented two internal audit reports to the committee on Health and Safety and Business Continuity Planning. Both reports received a satisfactory assurance rating, some low priority recommendations were made which should be completed for the next update to the committee

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

in June. The committee noted most of these recommendations were already being done in the College however they had not been formally recorded.

- The CFO presented the Strategic Risk Register, and the committee noted the impact and pressures that Covid has placed on the College. The Director of C&IS presented an operational risk and gave the committee assurance on the work the College has done around student examinations and
- The Chief Technology Officer presented the IT Resilience Statement and advised that there had been a recent cyber-attack in another College, the committee have requested further information on the attack if it is available and a report will be provided to the GB if the updates provide anything of substance.

e) Finance, General Purposes and Staffing Committee briefing on meeting held on 30th March 2021:

Mrs Larkin gave a verbal overview of the recent meeting and advised members that along with the standing items for both finance and staffing the following business was discussed:

- The committee were provided with a Covid update on both a financial and HR perspective.
- The Staff Survey questions were presented to the committee, no changes were made as minimal change is made to the questions each year to allow trends and analysis to be completed.
- The CHRO presented a mid-year case management review and the committee noted that there has been a significant reduction in activity, and it is unclear whether this can be attributed to the impact of the pandemic or not. The CHRO advised the pandemic has however had an impact on the timelines for completing cases, and Trade Unions have found themselves with a significant backlog of cases and difficulty in engaging in a timely way.
- Mrs Larkin concluded her report by advising that the committee had recommended the two policies for approval that had been discussed under agenda item 5.

f) Education Committee briefing on meeting held on 23rd March 2021:

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Mr Pollard, Vice Chair of the Education Committee gave a brief overview of the committee’s recent meeting, the following points were highlighted to members:

- The committee had the regular open Q&A session with the management team on the impact of Covid, the Vice Chair advised that the committee continue to be very assured in all aspects if this work.
- The Head of Quality, Excellence and Development attended the committee and talked at length about the issues facing students taking examinations and the problems that are still facing the Colleges in getting robust guidance from the awarding organisations. The Vice Chair advised the Head of QED gave her expertise and assurance on the matter to the committee which is very complex.
- The Vice Chair advised that the Head of QED would be retiring over the Summer and he wanted to highlight her work and that she will be a loss to the committee.
- The committee received a presentation on Entrepreneurship which was impressive to see the body of work and the future plans the team have.
- He went on to advise that Heather Reid and Neil Bodger had finished their terms as Governors, and both were thanked at the committee for their significant contribution to the committee and GB. Mrs Reid was thanked as she had been an outstanding Chair, her willingness to work hard and engage with the agenda was praised.

g) Minutes of the Chair’s Working Group meeting, held on 18th March 2021:

The Temporary Chair asked members to note the enclosed minutes and advised that the working group’s purpose was to coordinate committee business.

7. Any Other Business:

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Temporary Chair advised that the Director of FE, Beverly Harrison would be retiring at the end of June. He asked that the Governing Body’s thanks was recorded to her as she has been a good support to the GB in her time in post. A replacement has not been identified by the Department yet.

The Principal added that Jim Wilkinson who works closely with the College is moving to the Department of Health and so there will be a significant loss of knowledge within the Department. There is a significant period of change within the Department with the new tender for apprenticeship, introduction to traineeships and the review of governance arrangements. The Temporary Chair noted that with a change in personnel this is a risk to be managed with the Department.

8. Confidential Business:

At this juncture, Messrs Corbett, Lee, Mrs Cochrane and Miss Richardson left the meeting. [19:18]

A separate note was taken for this item.

Date of next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Monday 28th June 2021, 17.30, via Microsoft Teams

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 19:48

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Temporary Chair of the Governing Body



**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 26TH April 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**