

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 27<sup>th</sup> June, at 17:30 (GMT) Lisburn Meeting Room and 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), Mr John Mackell, Mr Ken Webb (CEO/Principal), Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Darren Stewart, Mr Mark Huddleston, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mr Michael McQuillan, Mr Andrew Corbett, Miss Gemma Diamon (Student Governor)

**In Attendance:**

Ms Veronica Healy (temporary Minute Taker), Mr Tommy Martin (Chief Finance Officer (“CFO”), Mr Paul Smyth (Chief Human Resources Officer (“CHRO”))

**Apologies:** Mrs Karen Fraser, Dr Daniel McConnell, Mr Steve Pollard and Amy Frazer

**In the Chair:**

Mr Alan McCrum (Vice Chair of Governing Body)

The Vice Chair began the meeting by sending sincere condolences on behalf of members to Claire Williamson on her recent family bereavement. He indicated that she was in our thoughts and prayers during this very difficult time.

**b) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:**

The Vice Chair invited members to declare any known or perceived conflicts of interests. No conflicts were declared.

**c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022:**

The Governing Body reviewed the Minutes of the Meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022. Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the Meeting.

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**Agreed:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body, held on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2022, be approved and adopted.

**Proposed by:** Majella Corrigan

**Seconded by:** Andrew Corbett

**d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous meetings**

Nothing further reported.

**e) Update SERC Chair Recruitment Competition**

Nothing further reported.

**f) Governors Register of Interests**

The Vice Chair reminded members of their collective interests outside SERC and highlighted that it was their responsibility to update their Register of Interests form if any changes occurred, and to notify the Secretary of the Governing Body accordingly to ensure they were documented on the register.

**Agenda Item 2: Correspondence:**

**a) ODT Review of DfE Sponsorship Model Report**

The Principal directed members to the written correspondence and asked members if they had any questions. Ms Corrigan asked in relation to Option 5: Hybrid Approach and if we had any insight into the approach they would be using. The Principal responded in the negative and that he would pick up this matter further in his report under the Partnership Agreement.

**b) Letter from DfE re 2022/23 Budget Position Update**

The Principal asked members to note the correspondence and indicated that as of last Thursday there had been some indication that we may get a budget allocation around the 6<sup>th</sup> July. He

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highlighted that the College had received additional funding for Business Services and this would be reviewed by the CFO under Agenda Item 4.

Mr M McQuillen joined the meeting at this juncture (5.39pm).

**Agenda Item 3:**

**a) Principal and Chief Executive’s report:**

The Principal directed members to his circulated report and highlighted some of the main points:

- Staff and Student Achievements. Members noted that there had been several achievements since the last meeting
- Reference to the Times Education Commission publishing its final report, over 600 witnesses including Dr Michael Malone and the Principal contributing to the year-long project
- Members noted the circulated presentation the Director of FE, DfE was giving to the NRC Governing Body on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June updating them on various sector matters.
- Tribal are due back tomorrow to clarify in terms of the numbers and making their way round the colleges.

The Final report is due to be published in August.

The Principal asked members if they wished to ask any questions. Nothing was reported.

An update was provided by the Principal in relation to the Partnership Agreement which had been issued by DfE based on the DoF guidance and its partnership with the Arm’s Length Bodies. He indicated that this framework has been produced and we had sight of the document and had an opportunity to comment upon it. The same level of governance applies rather than a situation where there is a reduction in the amount of oversight and wider governance. The Director of FE, DfE has asked the sector to form a small working group to look at those items that might be changeable within the remit. The aim is to get this working group up and running before the end of the summer. DfE have also asked for a small working group to look at the CDP also. In terms of

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the Partnership working group, it should include involvement and feedback to governing bodies and not work independently as this was a strategic matter. The changes to the Partnership agreement are minor for example, previously rules did not allow the colleges to authorise the payment in settlement of a legal case by more than £2k and this has now been changed to £7k. The Temporary Chairman referred to wording within this document which stated that where current arrangements were working well, the current level of autonomy would be maintained but. He went on where existing arrangements were not working, autonomy would be reduced. He noted that in no instances more autonomy would be granted. .

The CFO came in at this point and indicated that he did not see any significant changes and that he did not see any changes in terms of the financial governance.

The Principal indicated that separately DfE officials were looking at reducing the duplication of information being requested by separate branches of DfE. An ex TEO official had been brought in to carry out the exercise with input from a member of NIFON and the Training Managers’ Groups. The Vice Chair asked, was there likely to be some sort of delivery in a short space of time. The Principal responded that this should move forward quite quickly.

The Principal also highlighted that the two Ministers (Education and Economy) had launched the 14-19 framework document yesterday at Bangor Academy and our SPACE building. They were impressed with what they had seen.

The Principal advised members that his term as Chair of the Principals’ Group ended last Thursday and that the Principal of Belfast Met would be Chair now for this current year, Mel Higgins would be Vice Chair and Leo Murphy would be Chair after this incoming year. The Chairman thanked the Principal for sharing this information with members.

**b) Draft CDP 2022/23**

The Principal referred members to the circulated draft CDP and highlighted that the document was still work in progress and not for approval at this stage. It will be submitted to the DfE before the

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30<sup>th</sup> of June deadline. A final version will be produced by the end of September. The Principal highlighted that he had spoken to the Director of FE, DfE who had reconfirmed that this draft will not be reviewed.

Mr Huddleston indicated that he would welcome coverage of innovation across the CDP and asked if it was possible to include:

- something in points 4 or 5 to highlight innovation and skills (Skilling Report) and how FE will be vital to success of City and Regional Growth Deals.
- a separate point to be added on page 17 emphasising important role of college in developing skills for green growth, net zero and a circular economy.

**Action:** These additions to be reported back to the Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Control for inclusion in the draft 22/23 CDP

**Agenda Item 4: Items for Approval**

**a) 2022/23 Baseline Operational Budget**

On the invitation of the Chair the CFO presented the Baseline Resource Budget 2023 to members. He reported that the overall position would not be firmed up until August/September and that this was a Baseline budget in that it was built on the best information available at this time. It will be revalidated to ensure accuracy in September in line with SERC’s standard budgeting procedure. He outlined that it was based on the “Resource Requirement” which is arrived at by quantifying SERC’s total resource expenditure less income received outside the core grant (known as “Grant-in-Aid”). The balancing number represents SERC’s “Resource Requirement”, to be funded via DfE core grant. The CFO also confirmed to members that at present there was no budget allocation confirmed and no further estimated amounts have been quantified. DfE did write to the Colleges on 31st March indicating that they “do not envisage that the Resource budget position will be quite as stark as outlined in the initial scenario planning exercise”, but no further detail was provided.

The CFO provided an overview of income and expenditure to the committee members and the following points were highlighted:

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- Total income has reduced by approximately £1,285k year-on-year when compared with the Period 9 forecast.
- The most significant reduction relates to Training for Success / Apprenticeship NI funding which is expected to decrease by £1,131k as a result of the continued introduction of Traineeships and the phasing out of Level 2 delivery under the TfS income stream in August 2021. With the shift of this delivery to Traineeships, SERC would expect Traineeship funding under Grant-in-Aid to increase by approximately £981k i.e. the apparent reduction in income is in large part a reclassification of the relevant funding from “income” to “core Grant-in-Aid.”
- Staffing costs will increase by c. £777k or 2.17%. Although there are a number of individual changes in the staffing budget, this bottom-line increase is largely attributable to uncontrollable pay pressures of c. £891k
- Other operating expenses show a decrease of £1,449k when compared to the current year forecast.
- He was expecting the College to be facing a pressure of c. £5.3 m if the £36,946k indicative allocation alluded to by DfE in February is confirmed and an adjustment to reflect the reclassification of the 22/23 TfS/Traineeship funding is factored in.

The CFO concluded that he was recommending approval of this Budget on the basis that it was the plan that we have in place, although there was a lot of uncertainties. It will be brought back to the September F&GP and Governing Body for final approval.

The Principal indicated that on Wednesday we may get an indication of our MaSN position which would therefore impact on our HE funding.

The CFO asked members if they had any questions:

- Mr Huddleston asked was there any risk to the College if we don’t see our budget allocation before the summer break. The CFO indicated that we would continue with the cash draw-down process that we have in place and that we will be covered until end September. The CFO also confirmed that we were keeping a tight hold on spending at

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present, but it was very difficult when we don’t know the context. DfE are aware and the College is continuing its monthly forecasting. Mr Huddleston also asked was there a risk to the College delivery if we find there are anomalies come September. The Principal responded by saying that the College would not be reducing any of its enrolments or courses. He also indicated that it would not be prudent to turn away students as we would be still paying staff costs.

The Vice Chair thanked the CFO and the Principal for their very helpful contribution.

- The Temporary Chairman of the Governing Body asked if we have been given any indications from the DfE in relation to the amount of funding that we will have available relevant to last year. The Principal reported that we have had no indication from the DfE but that the PS in the Department of Finance could authorise 95% of the budget and that we have had no guarantees and were just operating in a ‘flux’ at this point. He concluded by saying that the College has adequate cash draw-down to the end of September without a budget and at the six-month period from May there may need to be another election.

The Vice Chair concluded by saying that the work that the CFO had carried out had been very valuable and that it was clear that there were ongoing pressures that were inescapable.

**Agreed:** The Governing Body reviewed and approved the 2022/23 Baseline Operational Budget.

**Proposer:** Deborah O’Hare

**Seconder:** Majella Corrigan

**b) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2022;**

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

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr M Huddleston and seconded by Mr D Stewart.

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**c) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 12<sup>th</sup> April 2022;**

Ms Deborah O’Hare, Vice Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr M McQuillen and seconded by Mr A Corbett

**d) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> April 2022:**

Mr McCrum, Chair of the FGP Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr D Wilson and seconded by Mr A Corbett.

**5. Policies for approval**

The following Policies had been previously agreed by email and have been ratified by members as follows:

**a) Complaints and Compliments Policy**

Proposer Karen Fraser

Seconded Derek Wilson

**b) Safeguarding Care and Welfare Policy**

Proposer Karen Fraser

Seconded Derek Wilson

**c) Access to Information (FOI and EIR) Policy**

Proposer-Karen Fraser

Seconded-Derek Wilson

**e) Hospitality and Gifts Policy**

The CFO brought to the attention of members that there had been significant changes to the Hospitality and Gifts policy to incorporate the latest DfE/DoF guidance.

**Agreed:** The Governing Body approved the Hospitality and Gifts Policy.

**Proposer:** Gareth Hetherington



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**Secunder:** Sam Hagen

**6. Items for Information**

**a) Financial Governance Report**

In presenting the Financial Governance Report the CFO advised that the Financial Governance Report presented the performance of the College for both the Departmental financial year ended 31 March 2022 (actual) and the College financial year ended July 2022 (forecast). The CFO confirmed that the actual outcome for the Departmental year to 31 March 2022, was a Resource Requirement of £41,137k. The actual result was c. £810k better than the resource target of £41,946k, and members noted that there were several variances feeding into this, the most significant being:

- £315k of income from the Flexible Skills Fund had been recognised in March. This was forecasted for April, but delivery was completed in March.
- £230k of accrued pay award for Part Time Lecturers has been released because the recent backdated final pay award agreement did not extend to Part Time Lecturer rates.
- £200k of estates revenue spend intended to reduce the total variance has been delayed by 4 – 6 weeks due to the wide-ranging supply chain and labour issues currently impacting the construction industry.
- £55k of Tfs income had been recognised in March which was expected in April. This is a timing issue in terms of participant achievement and claims processing.
- £59k of VPRS funding had been received and recognized. This relates to costs previously incurred in the 19/20 year and was only confirmed in the last quarter of the year. Despite attempts to utilize the funding, lead times meant this was not possible before end of March.

The CFO confirmed that this outturn had been discussed with DfE FE Finance and that at April’s NIFON meeting DfE had indicated they were content with the sector outturn. SERC’s Departmental year outturn was therefore deemed to have “met target”

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The CFO outlined that the end of July position was also expected to be better than originally planned.

The College’s year-end resource requirement target is currently (as at Period 9) £43,856k. Following May’s IMPMS meetings, the Period 9 forecast outlines a Resource Requirement £1,254k lower than this at £42,602k. This variance reflects:

- Increased income in relation to Skills Intervention programme, Deloitte Skills Academy, Higher

Level Apprenticeships, TfS and grants.

- An easement in expenditure for the period April to July caused by actual enrolments (and therefore overall delivery costs) on the new Traineeship programmes being significantly lower than originally envisaged. Although DfE have adjusted the Traineeship funding for the period August to March, they have yet to do this for the period April to July.
- Significantly reduced Covid-19 related expenditure to reflect the lifting of restrictions and public health advice. It was noted that these had all ceased from Easter.
- Substantially increased expenditure in a variety of areas, the most notable being Utilities due to significantly increased costs; and Estates Maintenance and IT Equipment due to planned increases in investment.

The CFO confirmed that the end of July forecast and the associated tightening of expenditure would help the College going into the second half of the Departmental year in the context of the expected funding challenges.

The Vice Chair reported that it was very reassuring that we were able to make those savings going through to period 10 and that there was a responsible approach reflected. The Chair thanked the CFO for his comprehensive report and highlighted that the quality and professionalism of the financial reporting.

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**b) Strategic Risk Register**

The CFO presented the Strategic Risk Register to members, highlighting the Red Risks. He confirmed that:

- R074: Managing the Financial Viability of the College remains a ‘Red’ risk due to the levels of uncertainty
- R086: Maintaining current levels – the details of the workstreams, advertising, the progression of a bursary to stimulate demand, applications have increased compared to previous years - 40% increase in 2021/22 (346) to 2022/23 (483). It was highlighted to members that these were not enrolments, and that the translation rate will not be known until August.
- R089: Coronavirus Pandemic – this was downgraded before the last meeting and remains at an ‘Amber’ Risk.

The CFO asked members if they had any questions.

- Mr Mackell highlighted to members that this was a standing item on the Audit Committee agenda and was a cornerstone of the risk management and engagement. The Vice Chairman confirmed that he was very content with the level of scrutiny, the oversight and awareness was very strong and that these Risks would be kept under review. He thanked both the CFO and Mr Mackell for their input.

**c) Staff Governor Reports**

On the invitation of the Vice Chair Mr Corbett addressed the meeting. He began by wishing members a restful summer break. Mr Corbett commented on his end of academic year observation, and how he had a final visit today from the external Examiner. He highlighted to members how he had found it very difficult and challenging to get work in from some students and

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how the quality of the work had not been the same post covid, although recruitment was going as expected. The Vice Chair thanked Mr Corbett for his input and wished him a good summer break.

A brief discussion took place. The Principal indicated that retention rates for the present academic year were likely to match the previous year. Mrs O'Hare commented that in the school sector the first year of covid had been very disruptive, this year's term 1 was still very disruptive and that a more normal academic year had been for the last two terms. She also highlighted that attendance had been down in the schools' sector by approx. 5-7%. The Vice Chairman concluded by saying that there had been a complex mix of factors that have been presented and these had been unprecedented given the impact of the pandemic on across education

**d) Student Governor Report**

The Student Governor talked to her written report and highlighted some of the recent work undertaken by the Students Union, as follows:

- Clubs and Societies have been successful
- In April a few of the Student Officers attended an annual conference and one of the officers had been elected to the Steering Committee
- Class reps have voted for a new Volunteering Committee
- There has been distribution to the local food banks
- Sophie Leigh Francis has been newly appointed as the student governor
- Opportunity to go to Bilbao as part of the Erasmus mobility. The Student Governor highlighted that this had been such an amazing experience for her, and she had made great connections with SERC hospitality staff who had now become role models and mentors to her. She indicated that she could not thank them enough for the support that they had afforded to her. She concluded by saying that she feels supported by the SERC and that she had felt so happy that she had made the choice to come to the College and that it was a pleasure and honour to be the student governor representative and thanked members for their support.

The Vice Chair commented how he really valued the honesty of what the student governor had to bring to the meeting. The Temporary Chair thanked her for her contribution throughout the year

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and the work that she is doing in the College and at each of the Governing Body meetings. He concluded by saying that it was very important as a governor to hear the student voice and how she had done that very well throughout the year and wished her all the very best for the future.

**e) Audit Committee briefing on meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> June 2022:**

Mr Mackell, Chair of the Audit Committee, provided an overview of the recent meeting, the following points were highlighted in summary, the committee received:

- An overview of the SERC Audit strategy and noted the deadline dates
- A presentation from Mr William Greer on his Operational risk register and a number of risks were identified, and income targets noted
- Report back from the Internal Auditor for two pieces of work – Procurement and Contract Management Review which received a satisfied outcome and Key Financial Controls Review which also received a satisfied outcome. It was highlighted to members that there were a few low priority findings to take forward for next year but a level of assurance, some tweaking of our internal processes but nothing arising that had caused any concerns in terms of the internal audit processes
- Positive feedback on the College’s Business Continuity Plan from the Open University which included comments “A great joy to read” and “this is by far the best BDP that I have ever read”. Mr Mackell thanked the Chief Finance Officer and his team and concluded by saying it was always good to get positive feedback and this was also echoed by the Vice Chair who reported that this was very affirming.

The Vice Chair thanked the Chief Finance Officer and his team for their engagement and collaboration throughout the year and highlighted how there had been a lot of positive results for audits. These sentiments were also echoed by members.

**f) Finance and General Purposes Committee briefing on meeting held on 13<sup>th</sup> June 2022:**

Mr McCrum, Chair of the FGP Committee, addressed the meeting and provided an update on the recent committee meeting, the following points were noted:

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- Mr McCrum advised the committee had a very productive and full agenda
- Financial pressures as not as stark as envisaged
- The CFO had presented the draft Baseline Operational Budget for 22/23. Mr McCrum indicated that the committee all are aware of the position and the challenges the College was facing
- Financial Governance Report was noted and presented earlier in the meeting by the CFO
- NDPB Budgeting and Forecasting submission for the financial year and there was nothing of any concerns noted
- Debt Report was presented by the CFO and no concerns identified by the committee
- Estates and Capital Expenditure Report - ongoing challenges faced with utility costs which are doubling going forward
- HR Priorities 21/22 plan and status updates/HR Key Metrics Report – these are all going well
- Staff Survey Results – findings from this staff survey will be shared in full at the September meeting.
- Applications and Enrolments – update provided by the Principal
- Confidential staffing matter – this will be discussed later under ‘confidential business’

**g) Education Committee briefing on meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> June 2022:**

Ms O’Hare, Vice Chair of the Education Committee, provided an update on the recent meeting and highlighted the following in summary:

- Correspondence from the Director of FE, DfE noted in relation to the 2022/23 budget position
- 14-19 strategy development framework document noted
- Safeguarding, Care and Welfare presentation provided by the Head of Pastoral Care and the Student Engagement Manager. An excellent Resilience Framework has been developed
- A very interesting presentation from Ms C Henderson on the International work. Mrs O’Hare echoed the words from Miss G Diamond in relation to the excellent work that is going on in the College

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- A very useful and comprehensive presentation from Mr W Greer on Employers: Traineeships and Apprentices (including HLAs)
- Update from Mrs H McKee on the College Development Plan for 22/23
- Update from Dr M Malone on the applications and enrolments
- Higher Education Review Board minutes from the 1<sup>st</sup> June were noted by the committee
- Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Report was noted by the committee
- ETI Report on Connected Learning
- No policies for presented for review or approval

**h) Chair’s Working Group Minutes of meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> May 2022:**

The Temporary Chair of the Governing Body reported that the purpose of this meeting was to co-ordinate committee business over the next cycle and how it was very routine in nature. Mr Mackell commented that this had been a light agenda and there had been nothing further to report.

**7. Any Other Business:**

The Vice Chair acknowledged that this had been Amy Frazer’s last meeting (Boardroom apprentice) and acknowledged our thanks and appreciation for her contribution over the last 12 months and wished her well for her future career plan going forward. The Temporary Chairman reported that he was due to meet with Ms Frazer next week and that he would pass on members best wishes to her.

The Vice Chair brought to the attention of members in relation to the face-to-face graduation that was scheduled for Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> September, Waterfront Hall.

Action: Members to confirm their attendance and car registration numbers to Ms V Healy if they required reserved car parking at the Laynon Place Car Park.

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The Temporary Chairman reported that he had just taken a phone call from the Director of FE and that the names had now been given to the Minister to make a final decision for the appointment of the newly appointed Chair of the Governing Body. He concluded by saying that they were not able to give a specific timeline when a decision would be made but it would be over the next few weeks.

**8. Confidential Business**

A separate note was taken for this item. At this juncture the staff & Student Governors left the meeting (7.07 pm)

**9. Session without Management**

A separate note was taken for this item. At this juncture the Principal, CFO, CHRO and temporary minute taker left the meeting (7.15 pm)

**Date of next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Monday 26<sup>th</sup> September 2022, 17.30, location TBC.

**There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.35 pm**

**Signed:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

Temporary Chair of the Governing Body