

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)
held on Monday, 6TH February 2023 17:30 (GMT) in Meeting Room D17, Lisburn Campus and via
Microsoft Teams**

Agenda Item 1: Chair’s Business:

a) Attendance and Apologies for Absences:

Present:

Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body), Mr Gareth Hetherington, Mr John Mackell, Mr Ken Webb (CEO/Principal), Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Darren Stewart, Dr Daniel McConnell, Mr Mark Huddleston, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mr Michael McQuillan, Mr Andrew Corbett; Ms Sophie Leigh Francis (Student Governor), Mrs Carolyn King, Ms Wilma Fee, Mrs Karen Fraser

In Attendance:

Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr Tommy Martin (Chief Finance Officer (“CFO”)), Mrs Heather McKee (Director of Strategic, Planning, Quality and Support (“Director of SPQ&S”)), Mr Paul Smyth (Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO))

In the Chair:

Mr Nugent

The Chair began the meeting by noting that Mr Hetherington’s term will end on 30th April and while this is his last Governing Body meeting, he will be in attendance at the GB Strategy Day on 27th April and members will have an opportunity to express thanks to him for his work then.

b) Declarations of Conflicts of Interest:

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

c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body held on 21st November 2022:

The Governing Body reviewed the Minutes of the Meeting held on 21st November 2022.

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Agreed: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body, held on 21st November 2022, be approved, and adopted.

Proposed by: Mark Huddleston

Seconded by: Alan McCrum

d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings:

The Chair confirmed there were no outstanding actions from the previous meetings.

e) Governing Body Strategy Day

The Director of Strategic, Planning, Quality and Support addressed the meeting to advise of the initial plans for the upcoming strategy day, she highlighted the focus on reviewing the SERC 2030 strategy and the 7 priority areas within it to ensure that it is still fit for purpose and aligns with the delivery of the 10x strategy. She added that she would welcome input from members on what other content they would find most useful in the session and advised that in terms of the College Development Plan there should be more clarity from the Department in April on the submission for 2023/24.

Action: The Director of SPQS will circulate a summary paper setting out the content of the Strategy day to members for consideration by the end of February

f) Governing Body Membership

The Chair began by welcoming Wilma Fee to her first Governing Body meeting as a newly appointed co-opted member of the Board. Mrs provided a brief overview of her background and the Chair noted that there is a strong and diverse Board in place.

The Chair further advised that he has asked the Department for advice on the upcoming terms of members expiring over the next 12 months. The Chair highlighted that the Board needs to effectively function particularly in response to the Delivery review. The Department have agreed to seek further advice from the Departmental Solicitors Office on whether any further extensions can be given to these members.

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Agenda Item 2: Correspondence:

a) 10x Delivery Plans Commissioning Note

The Principal directed members to the correspondence and advised in December the Department had asked to indicate how we as a college and all ALBS are delivering and how activities align to 10x. The submission for 22/23 has been provided which was drawn from the information on the Whole College Self Evaluation Report ; and now the College will be working on the template for 23/24.

Giulia Ni Dhulchaointigh, the Departments lead on 10x Economic Vision had provided feedback on the original submissions, and whilst there are no ambers or red from the sector as a whole, what was agreed is the requirement to have common understanding of language and metrics being used. Ms Ni Dhulchaointigh is scheduled to meet with the Principal to discuss the delivery of 10x further and particularly metrics and to help her get better understanding of the College.

The Chair thanked the Principal for the update and noted that the Department are very focused on the delivery of 10x and he felt the College has a major role to play ensuring that it reaches across all parts of the NI economy.

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

The Principal talked to the written report provided and began by highlighting the recent success of the College at the Beacon awards. The Chair commented that this success demonstrates the scope and depth of the College.

Moving on the Principal highlighted the analysis completed by the data analyst officer in response to the recent Departmental report. Members were directed to slide 17 within the report which sets out the success rates across the Sector and clearly shows SERC with the highest success rate with 80.2% achievement.

In response to a members question the Principal set out some reasons for the ongoing decline in enrolments. He began by advising that the competition from schools retaining pupils in 6th form directly impacts the Sector. There are fewer people coming from other UK regions to study in NI and an increase in the MaSN at Queen’s University

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has been direct competition with those who would have come to study HE in FE. Ms Fee commented that there has also been a significant demographic decline which has only started to climb again recently. She further noted that the decline in enrolments should not be a statement of what the College can do but more where we are in terms of the Northern Ireland demographics.

The Principal advised that there is a report on the outcomes of graduates which was recently viewed by the Education committee. He highlighted that this is a Departmental report and the response rate to the survey by individuals having left FE is too low to draw any meaningful conclusions. He added that our own research indicated that 97% of SERC students will progress into HE or work and this has been a consistent rate over the last number of years.

Agenda Item 4: Items for Approval

a) Partnership Agreement

The Chair reminded members that this decision had been agreed at Education committee due to time constraints and that the Secretary would record the decision in these minutes for completeness.

Agreed: The Governing Body agreed the draft Partnership Agreement on the proposal of Gareth Hetherington and seconded by John Mackell

b) Annual Quality Assessment

The Chair advised he had been asked to sign the Annual Quality Assessment for 2021-22 on behalf of the Governing Body. He noted that the decision is based on the various submissions regarding quality made over the course of the academic year 21/22. Members agreed they were content to approve the submission.

Agreed: The Governing Body agreed to sign off the 21/22 Annual Quality Assessment

c) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 9th November 2022:

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

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of John Mackell and seconded by Mark Huddleston.

d) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 15th November 2022;

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Mr Pollard, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Sophie Francis and seconded by Karen Fraser

e) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 8th November 2022:

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

Agreed: The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Danny McConnell

5. Policies for approval

The Chair advised there was nothing to note.

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 since the report had been produced the Department had confirmed additional funding of £313k and so the pressure for the end of March has now been reduced to £93k. The CFO highlighted that there is a risk around the March year end relating to the TAMS system as the College does not have a detailed forecast of the income, the Department have asked the College to manually forecast which is a huge administrative task.

In response to a members question the CFO confirmed that staff are still having to invoice manually as the TAMS system has less than 10% accuracy.

The Chair of the Audit committee enquired if NIAO are aware of the issues with the TAMS system. The CFO advised that they familiar with the issue as it is frequently discussed at Audit committee when they are in attendance. The CFO confirmed that there is minimal impact on learners and employers because the team are processing all relatable allowances manually, but this is not sustainable.

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The Chair of the Governing Body highlighted the stress that this has put staff under and expressed the support of the GB to all involved in this work.

b) Staff Governor Reports

On the invitation of the Chair Mrs King, Corporate Staff Governor, talked to her written report. She highlighted the success of the corporate staff development day that had been well received by the staff. She also informed members of the staff associations that have been set up in the Lisburn and Bangor campuses the aim of which are to help create and manage social and recreational activities for both academic and corporate staff on campus.

Mr Corbett, Academic Staff Governor, advised members of the recent open evening and highlighted that it is likely there will be further strike action by academic staff.

c) Student Governor Report

The Student Governor talked to the written report provided and advised members of the recent work the Student’s Union have been doing across the College. The Student Governor highlighted the work on welfare packs for students and the breakfast scheme that will be running to help students with the cost-of-living crisis. The CFO added that the welfare packs is a sector wide scheme that SERC are leading on and have done the procurement for, £400k additional funding has been secured for this work. The CFO advised that the welfare packs contain hygiene products and warm winter clothing, the clothing can be accessed via a referral scheme.

The Chair thanked the Student Governor for a comprehensive update and noted that there is a significant amount of work going on which the Student’s Union should be commended for.

At this juncture Mrs O’Hare joined the meeting.

d) Audit Committee briefing on meeting held on 18th January 2023

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

- The Chair advised that the committee the main theme of the meeting had been around risk and members had reviewed the strategic risk register and had noted that the risk on Covid would be coming off the register and would be managed through operational risk registers in the relevant areas.

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- The Director of Curriculum & Information Services presented his operational risks and members were able to understand how these risks are managed. Correspondence from the Department on the risk appetite had been reviewed and there was also a detailed discussion on how risks are presented to the Governing Body and the approach the College takes to risk management.
- To conclude the annual audit the NIAO presented the final Report to those Charged with Governance report and members commended the CFO and his team again on an excellent audit result.
- The CFO had advised of a new suspected fraud case and members noted this had been reported to the Department and would receive updates when they are available.

e) Finance and General Purposes Committee briefing on meeting held on 17th January 2023

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

- The Chair advised the committee had explored the current financial position in depth and noted that there is a pressure of £45k to the end of March and that the College were confident the July year end would be on target.
- Other standing reports were presented including the financial operational report and the estate update where the CFO had advised that while utilities consumption had decreased the costs had not.
- Moving onto staffing items the committee had reviewed the HR strategic priorities where it was highlighted the 7 were broadly in line with the exception of the priority around academic staff pay awards and recognition. The HR metrics report was reviewed, and it was noted that staff absence has increased to 3.59% and this is a pattern emerging across the Sector, the College absence rates are mainly around serious long-term illness.
- The CHRO had committed to update the training report presented to include the data on all estates training.
- Members noted that staff focus groups are currently being carried out and they would inform the next step on responding to the staff survey and a further report it is expected at the next committee meeting.

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- The Head of Health & Safety delivered the annual review of H&S and agreed to integrate ‘near miss incidents’ into the reports going forward and the committee noted that there was a plan for external support to review the quality framework in this area..

g) Education Committee briefing on meeting held on 24th January 2023

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

- The Chair began by advising the committee had reviewed correspondence from the Department including the FE Leavers Report. The Director of SPQS took the committee through the public consultation on Vocational Qualifications in NI and Level 4/5.
- Members reviewed the SOLIS report that detailed the FE and training system in Ireland, the Chair highlighted it had been useful to see an all-Ireland perspective to FE.
- The Director of SPQS talked the committee through the 10X response and Business Services gave a very interesting presentation on their work which had married neatly with the 10X discussion.
- Under general business the committee noted an update on the College Development Plan, the applications and enrolments report and the HERB meeting minutes from the 18th January had been reviewed and approved.
- Some items of AOB had been discussed, firstly the Chair had commended the College staff and students for the recent success in the BT Young Scientist Awards and the Chair of the GB had tabled the draft Partnership Agreement for approval to meet the departmental deadline.

h) Chair’s Working Group Minutes of meeting held on 10th January 2023

Members were asked to note the minutes for information. The Chair highlighted some of the main points of discussion and advised members that in response to a discussion the Chair of the Education committee had extended an invitation to Lorna Warren from DfE Quality Branch, to the next committee meeting and she has accepted.

7. Any Other Business:

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The Chair advised members that the use of a WhatsApp group would not be taken forward to signpost members to urgent business, as on the advice of College management, the app is not supported by College systems and so we will revert to relying on text messages.

The Chair reminded members that a report on Board Effectiveness would be presented at the meeting in June and advised if anyone would like to make any suggestions, they are still welcome to do so.

The Chair advised that he had attended the Accountability meeting with the Principal in which a very comprehensive report was made by the executive team. The Chair advised the Department that there was a robust governance system in place and the Chair noted that the presentation demonstrated not only the high-quality offering at SERC but also the strong leadership in the College.

8. Confidential Business

A separate note was taken for this item.

Date of next Meeting:

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Monday 15th May 2023, 17.30, Lisburn Campus.

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 7.22pm

Signed: _____

Date: _____

John Nugent

Chair of the Governing Body