

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Item No	Item
1.	<p><b>Chair’s Business:</b></p> <p><b>a) Attendance and Apologies</b></p> <p><b>Present:</b> Mrs H Reid, Mr K Webb (Principal/CEO), Mr G Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Mr J Mackell, Mrs K Fraser, Mr N Bodger, Mr A Corbett, Mr J Lee, Miss M Richardson, Mr S Pollard, Mrs D O’Hare, Mr M Huddleston, Mr A McCrum, Mr D Stewart, Mr D Wilson, Mr D McConnell</p> <p><b>In Attendance:</b> Mrs H McKee (Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support (the “Director of SPQ&amp;S”)), Dr M Malone (Director of Curriculum &amp; Information Services ((the “Director of C&amp;IS”)), Mrs C Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mrs H Miller (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development), Mrs C Henderson (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development &amp; International)</p> <p><b>Apologies:</b> Professor A Woodside</p> <p><b>In the Chair:</b> Mrs H Reid</p> <p>The Chair noted the apologies and gave a special welcome to the new members of the committee, she advised that the main business for this meeting would be to review and approve the Whole College Self Evaluation Report and Quality Improvement Plan, which was opportune for the new members as it provided an excellent way to gain an insight into the College’s achievements and activity.</p> <p><b>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest</b></p> <p>Mr Stewart declared that he was the Finance Director of Inspire which was referenced in the papers under agenda items 5a and 7. No other conflicts were declared in relation to the presented agenda items.</p> <p><b>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020</b></p> <p>The Chair invited members to review the minutes from the previous meeting. The Committee agreed the minutes were a true and accurate record of the meeting.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px;"> <p><b>Agreed:</b> That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> November 2020, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body.</p> <p><b>Proposer:</b> Andrew Corbett</p> <p><b>Seconder:</b> Karen Fraser</p> </div> <p><b>d) Chair’s Update:</b></p> <p>The Chair began by congratulating Claire Henderson who was awarded an MBE for her services to Further Education in the New Year’s Honour’s List. She passed on her heartfelt congratulations on behalf of the committee on the excellent accolade.</p>

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The Chair reminded members that this would be her penultimate meeting before her term comes to an end in March, in terms of contingency planning Mr Pollard has agreed to co-Chair the next meeting in his capacity as Vice Chair and then Chair the last meeting in May to round off the academic year. The Chair advised that this would allow new members an opportunity to gain some knowledge of the College and the Committee before expressions of interests are sought for a new Chair. The Chair advised that this process will be conducted in accordance with the Standing Orders.

**e) Q&A Session with CMT re Covid-19 Activities and Student Support**

For the benefit of the new members the Chair advised that in previous meetings a Q&A session on Covid was held and this would continue as it allows all members the opportunity to enquire and gain assurance on the response to the pandemic. The Chair invited the Principal to begin by providing members with an update, the following points were noted:

- The Department for Economy have indicated that a grant may be available for students towards the cost of data and broadband, early indications are this will be £60 per head for full time students, information is being gathered on part time students to avail of the grant. The Principal advised that the funding is subject to a business case and will be for non-practical courses only.
- The 14-19 project was started again at the end of November with the first board meeting in January, the Principal advised the committee will be kept updated as the project progresses.
- Erasmus funding has been cut as a result of EU Exit, previously the FE Sector was allocated £8.1m however this will reduce significantly to less than £450k which is a major issue for the Sector.
- The Principal invited the Director of Curriculum & Information Services to provide an update on examinations. The Director began by advising members that the Department had established a Task and Finish Group in April 2020 whose purpose was to look at the issues surrounding vocational examinations. The Director advised that as we are already 6 weeks into the current lockdown the Sector needs decisions to be made swiftly and these need to be clearly communicated, students are already suffering a lot of stress due to the lockdown and need clarity on their examinations.
- The Director provided an overview of the role of CCEA as a regulator and that their view was, they were powerless to act on any examinations that fall under Ofqual. Other awarding organisations do not agree with this stance but CCEA have so far seemed reluctant to exercise their powers as they have advised Ofqual can overrule them and so they have little control. The Director highlighted that time is critical for our students as we are a month ahead of the English schedule and so time is critical and late decisions will be ineffective.
- The Director highlighted that during the first lockdown in 2020 City and Guilds had furloughed their Northern Ireland staff and so the College had no one to communicate with to clarify what was happening with their awards, he advised that no guidance was forthcoming until June 2020 which was totally unsatisfactory.
- In September, the Department formed another group to deal with the day-to-day issues around vocational examinations however the Director advised little progress has been made. CCEA were

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

commissioned to review the overall matter around exams, the Director has raised that CCEA were directly conflicted as they have a role as a regulator and an awarding body and so could not possibly perform an independent review.

- The Director advised the committee that the completed report has vindicated his view as from the 50 responses submitted 2 were from FE and 10 were from awarding organisations, however the 2 FE responses represent a much larger majority collectively. The statistical analysis completed on the responses didn't normalise the weight the FE responses carry. This report has still not been fully completed and the Sector do not have the lessons learned from the Summer of 2020.
- The Director advised that up until the Christmas break the Department had a view that it was business as normal for the Colleges despite students having to isolate at times. The Director highlighted that students were returning to College in January and had no clear clarity on what was happening with their exams and this was completely unsatisfactory.
- The Sector requested that all exams were cancelled and requested a letter from the Minister outlining the plans for students and seeking them to engage with the Colleges, this was finally actioned on 21<sup>st</sup> January and CCEA have been advised to work with the awarding organisations to find an alternative.
- Since then, the Director advised that he has met with Pearson and are seeking a way forward with them.
- The Director highlighted that the College is trying to give students a bit more certainty and asking them to engage and submit evidence to their tutors. He noted that this should be the job of the regulator, but the College continues to update the students, it is causing students immense stress and the College has committed to providing as much assistance to them as possible.

The Chair asked Mrs. Fraser if she was satisfied with how this issue had been raised as Mrs Fraser had raised concerns around the process during the last committee meeting. Mrs Fraser commented that in terms of how quickly the matter is moving forward it is unsatisfactory however, she was content the College has gone above and beyond in terms of their role in the matter.

Mr McCrum enquired why there seems to be a lack of accountability around CCEA's role. The Director of C&IS responded that CCEA have an established good relationship with the Department and it seemed that they were unwilling to challenge CCEA's view that they had no control over the matter. However, it appears the Department have realised the issue reached a crisis point in mid-January. The Chair commented that CCEA do not seem to be fit for purpose and cannot serve students appropriately during a time that was foreseeable. The Director agreed and informed members that he had been stressing to the Department that we were no longer responding to an emergent situation.

The Chair asked for the committee thanks to be recorded to the College and members of the Task and Finish group for being so persistent and ensuring the issues were rectified on behalf of students and staff in the Sector.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Director of C&IS moved on to give the committee an overview of online learning and the loan of IT Equipment, he asked members to note that are currently 750 PC’s on loan to students and the College has been trying to target the most deprived students. During this current lockdown some students are helping to home school their siblings and so the demand for equipment has increased. The Director advised that there has been excellent feedback from students and parents on the loan of the equipment and especially as the equipment was delivered to their door in some instances.

Mr Stewart enquired if there were any conditions around the loan of equipment to encourage students to engage more. The Director replied that the College has started making changes to pedagogy and have surveyed students to ensure any changes reflect how we can do better to get them to engage and provide evidence to tutors. A focus has been placed on the social aspect that students are missing out on by staying home and so we are encouraging them to work in teams for project-based learning.

Mr Pollard complimented the College on this work, he noted that the pandemic impacts people very differently and will ultimately heighten the inequality that we are striving to address and so he was very impressed with the volume of equipment that is on loan and praised the work of the staff in delivering this. The Director commented that staff have been very committed in delivering this project.

The Principal advised that the desktop computers in the College have been repurposed and post Covid they would have been rotated, he noted that the lesson learned in this last year is that people need to improve their digital skills to adapt to an online environment. He advised members that there is a potential for the College to bid for some new iPad’s which are highly portable.

The Temporary Chair commended the College for this work and noted that this is a good news story which could be highlighted to the Minister.

The Chair agreed that the Minister could benefit from this story and noted the committee were content to continue receiving the updates on Covid.

**2. Matters Arising:****a) Action Points from the meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> November.**

The Chair advised that all actions had been completed.

At this juncture the Chair asked that her thanks were recorded to all SERC staff for their immense efforts during a truly stressful situation the last 10 months.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the "Committee")  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

<b>3.</b>	<b>Correspondence:</b>  Nothing to note.
<b>4.</b>	<b>Social Inclusion – For Information and Discussion:</b>  a) Engagement Update Report Update b) Engagement Plan 2020/2021  <p>The Director of SPQ&amp;S began by advising that the plan was enclosed in the papers for the benefit of new members. She advised that the plan outlines the College’s approach to engagement and the impact of engagement on people in deprived areas. The Director informed the committee that to continue engagement throughout the pandemic the College had switched to webinars and targeted community and statutory organisations in order to reach the wider community, however, since the last committee meeting there hasn’t been a lot of activity to report on. The Director advised that work had been mostly internal and work has began on a home schooling hub to aid parents with home schooling.</p> <p>In response to a query from Mr Stewart the Director advised that currently the school hub was only for staff and would be accessed through the staff intranet. The College is however is trying to add a link to the main website for everyone to access as the learning platform Moodle cannot be accessed externally.</p> <p>Mr Pollard suggested that the College could try and apply for National Lottery Funding to aid the engagement programmes.</p>
<b>5.</b>	<b>College Development Plan:</b> <b>a) Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Quality Improvement Plan 2019/20</b> <b>b) Quality Improvement Plan 2020-21 for Further Education, Higher Education and Work Based Learning</b>  <p>The Chair invited Mrs Miller, Head of Quality, Excellence and Development to present the College QIP/SER for 2019/20. The Head of QED advised members that it is a Departmental requirement for the College to conduct a self-evaluation of the College each year, it is normally carried out in November however, at the request of the Department it has been delayed until now. She advised that the report is a snapshot of the last year and an assessment on how the College managed during Covid.</p> <p>Members were asked to note the report has been updated to December and the District Inspector had reviewed the report in January and was content, the Head of QED advised that the report grading has been well established.</p> <p>The Head of QED asked the committee to note that despite the pandemic and very much not being business as usual the overall direction of travel for the College has stayed the same, we are still educating students, still retaining and students are still achieving. Albeit the methods used may be slightly different the targets for this year were similar to most years and the actions have been tailored to reflect this.</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Chair enquired if the Head of QED could advise why the quality of the photography course at table 5, page 9, has a lower rating this year. The Head of QED advised this course was being relaunched as it was felt in its current form it didn't meet the needs of students. The new programme will provide a new pathway for students to move onto level 4. Mr Corbett who is the Deputy Head of School which this programme sits under explained the pathway and commented it is hoped that within a year the course will be back to full compliment and meet the students needs.

The Chair asked if the Head of QED could reassure the committee of the validation processes in light of the Covid environment we are operating in. The Head of QED advised that regulators had not been clear with many of the vocational qualifications as the committee heard earlier under item 1 and by mid-March with no further clarity the Sector had to decide on the standards. Quality assurance processes were completed by case conferences and the reports demonstrate that students have engaged well. The Head of QED advised that the method and structures have not changed, they have been enhanced so that there is additional monitoring. The Director of C&IS highlighted that quality managers across the Sector had been meeting since mid-March to ensure standards were met and created a de-facto regulator to ensure this was done.

In response to question from Mr Mackell around demonstrating the effectiveness of online learning the Head of QED advised that project-based learning has been useful as it gives students the social interaction and is a form of continual assessment. She highlighted that regulations allow the College to mitigate assessments and PBL allows students to demonstrate what they are learning. The Director of C&IS advised that in terms of online learning Microsoft Teams is the main vehicle of delivery and in itself it has evolved since the start of the pandemic with elements like break out rooms added. The College is therefore constantly training staff in the use of Teams to ensure that students are as engaged as they can be.

The Director went on to advise members that a Know and Show is planned for the 3<sup>rd</sup> of February for PBL projects and this will provide a further opportunity to highlight anything that hasn't been working and improve on them as we move through the year.

Mr McCrum enquired if online learning will become a default in how learning is delivered and if there an evaluation of the student experience has been conducted. The Director of C&IS explained that students have been surveyed and this allows the College to interrogate the data across the student body which can be used to tweak and improve the delivery. In terms of going forward the Director advised that some cohorts can be delivered online post Covid, but this will be evaluated to meet the needs of the student. Mr McCrum commented that it was good to see a responsiveness built into the system.

Mrs O'Hare noted that the clear set up in an achievement framework was very commendable and reassuring for students, she commended the College for the work completed in this area.



**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Chair concluded the discussion by thanking the Heads of Quality, Development and Excellence for their efforts in delivering the SER/QIP and acknowledged the advancements the College is making despite the difficult external circumstances we are operating in.

**Agreed:** The committee reviewed and approved the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Quality Improvement Plan 2019/20 & Quality Improvement Plan 2020-21 for Further Education, Higher Education and Work Based Learning and recommended it for adoption at the next Governing Body meeting

**Proposer: John Mackell**

**Seconder: Steve Pollard**

**c) Update on College Development Plan**

The Director of SPQ&S advised that normally the commission note for the CDP would have been received by the College at this point in the year, but this has not happened. She advised that Departmental officials are reviewing the new Programme for Government where outcomes have been revised and she expects this will have an impact on the College Development Plan template.

**d) Applications and Enrolments**

The Principal provided the committee with an update and advised that since the last meeting there have not been many more enrolments, a small number have come through business services activity. He advised that the FE/HE prospectus has been launched and the Apprenticeship prospectus will be launched once it has been signed off by the Department. The Principal reminded the committee that TFS level 2 has been replaced and an interim programme will in place in September as the new programme has not been formulated by the Department yet.

The Principal highlighted that the main application period is normally in March however with changes to GCSE and A Level release dates the College may move to May/June enrolment days along with the planned day in August.

**6. Higher Education:**

**a) HE/FE Review Update**

The Principal informed the committee there had been no internal HE meeting since the last committee meeting in November 2020. He then went on to provide an update on the HE in FE review being conducted by the Department, for the benefit of the new members the Principal highlighted that HE in FE enrolments has been in decline over much of the Sector for a number of years due to the reduction in MaSN numbers and universities reducing their entry requirements. He advised the committee that the

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held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Department have been advised that if the current review takes a long time to conduct this review the HE in FE provision will have disappeared and so he was pleased to report that the review had started. The committee were advised that an Advisory Group has been established which has been broken down into component parts, the first part of the project is aiming to complete by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021.

**Action Point:** The Secretary will circulate the presentation on Higher Education that was presented in November 2020 to the new committee members

**7. Items for Information:**

**a) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Report**

The Director of SPQ&S directed members to the written report and highlighted that some non Covid issues which have been serious in nature have been raised along with mental health concerns as the long-term impact of the lockdown on students is now prevalent. The committee were advised that extra part time staff have been brought in to support the non Covid related issues.

The Chair enquired if work was ongoing to link with external agencies as had been planned before the pandemic and she asked if the Director could provide a clear definition on what a non Covid issue is. The Director provided an overview of the different definitions highlighting that non Covid covers all ‘normal’ issues such as caring responsibilities, financial difficulties and mental health. She advised that work was ongoing with external agencies like MACS and YMCA to provide appropriate support for referrals.

Mr Mackell asked the Director if she had any concerns around under reporting because students may be less engaged with College in an online environment, the Director advised that while the non-covid referrals were 26 less than the same period last year, some of this could relate to incidents or disagreements which would happen when students are on campus. It is hard to know for sure that all students are being identified and the Case Conferences were utilised to identify students who may not be engaging and had not already been referred to SERC Extra or the Cause for Concern system. However, the College is working hard to engage with students, the Student’s Union have delivered social events to interact more and staff are being encouraged to replicate the ‘craic’ from the classroom while on MS Teams. Online Counselling has worked well, and the initiative is being pushed hard to students, the Students Union have also been involved in flagging the service to students.

Mr Pollard commented on the excellent management structures that are in place to combat mental health, he noted that FE could be seen as a central focus where young people come together, he suggested that in working with other agencies a strategy specifically around mental health could be developed.

Mr Wilson had a query around attendance records, specifically it is symptomatic of something underlying and that the underlying issue is what should be properly recorded .The Director of C&IS advised that



**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)  
held on Tuesday, 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>sometimes students do not turn their cameras on and so in these cases attendance is not picked up on. Part of the pedagogy moving forward is that cameras must be turned on so that students are fully engaged.</p>
<b>8.</b>	<p><b>Policies for Review/Approval:</b></p> <p><b>a) Interim Policy for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities</b></p> <p>The committee were asked to note the enclosed policy and that this is a Sector policy.</p>
<b>9.</b>	<p><b>Any Other Business:</b></p>
	<p><b>Date and time of next meeting:</b></p> <p>It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021, at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference.</p>

**The meeting concluded at 7.22pm**