

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Item No	Item
1.	<p>Chair’s Business:</p> <p>a) Attendance and Apologies</p> <p>Present: Mrs H Reid, Mr K Webb (Principal/CEO), Mr G Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Mr J Mackell, Mrs K Fraser, 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, Professor A Woodside</p> <p>In Attendance: Mrs H McKee (Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support (the “Director of SPQ&S”)), Dr M Malone (Director of Curriculum & Information Services ((the “Director of C&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 & International), Mrs Aurla McLoughlin (Head of School) Agenda item 5 only, Ms Lizzie Buick (Deputy Head of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship) Agenda item 5 only , Mr Michael Holmes (Deputy Head of Enterprise and Entrepreneurship) Agenda item 5 only</p> <p>Apologies: Mr N Bodger</p> <p>In the Chair: Mrs H Reid, Mr Pollard</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest</p> <p>No conflicts of interest were declared.</p> <p>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 26th January 2021.</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: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; margin-top: 10px;"> <p>Agreed: That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 26th January 2021, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body.</p> </div>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference****Proposer: James Lee****Seconder: Andrew Corbett****d) Chair’s Update:**

The Chair advised that she would provide a verbal update under Any other Business and all other items were addressed within the agenda.

e) Expressions of interest for the post of Committee Chair

The Chair advised that as per the Standing Orders members would be given an opportunity to express an interest in the role of the Committee Chair as her term comes to an end. The Chair advised that Mr Pollard has kindly agreed to co-Chair this meeting and Chair the meeting in May in his capacity as vice Chair.

Action Point: Members interested in the role of Committee Chair were asked to advise the Temporary Chair of their interest by the end of April

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

The Principal began by advising that there was still a lack of clarity around examinations and assessments, and this was putting extreme pressure on staff and students to complete for the end of May.

He informed the committee that lateral flow testing may be introduced and this will be conducted by the Public Health Agency, he did not have any further information to provide at this time, but the committee will be updated as this information is available.

The Director of Curriculum & Information Services outlined some of the key issues for the College. He advised the College is still maximising online delivery with exemptions in place for practical activity. Some classes are being brought into the College to reset as issue of mental isolation has greatly impacted students, increasing reports of isolation are concerning and the Director noted that the lack of clarity for students around assessments is a key driver.

The Director informed the Committee there had been no recent meetings of the Task and Finish Group however he had met with Jim Wilkinson from DfE separately at the beginning of March and had raised

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

concerns that there were still significant issues around assessments. The recent Ofqual consultation has demonstrated further a lack of clarity and introduced new ways of assessing students.

The Director advised that the College has identified 520 students (90% of who are female) who will not finish their assessments this year, some are unable to complete because they have been unable to do the required placement in the areas of Health and Social Care and other cannot complete because they are unable to complete practical assessments such as Hair and Beauty.

The Director highlighted that there are only 4 weeks left of term after the Easter break and there is a significant number of practical assessments still outstanding, and it is highly unlikely at this stage that everyone will be able to complete. The Director has requested an urgent meeting with Jim Wilkinson and Rory Muldrew from DfE to discuss these issues tomorrow.

The Director advised that there are around 3600 students in the Sector affected by the assessments issues and these numbers are likely to grow, he noted that we are looking at a third year of disruption as staff are eager to get students back on track, they are still completing assessments in August and September whilst trying to deliver courses to a new cohort. The College has loaned out 1100 PCs to students to keep students engaged and on track for assessments, planning has started for next year with consideration on further restrictions. The Director stressed the College will try to get as many students through to the end of assessment as possible and will extend into Summer again this year if this is required.

He concluded that Ofqual have not given clarity around how assessments should be done but also around the appeals process which is another live issue that will be raised with the Departmental officials, the Colleges must have clarity from the awarding bodies.

The Head of Quality, Excellence and Development advise that Ofqual have provided an emergency framework that will allow awards to be completed up until 31st August 2021. She advised that CCEA have provided a 5-step approach on how A ‘Levels should be awarded, the College does have its own internal SOP that is regularly reviewed and updated and gave protection and clarity last year in awarding A ‘Levels. The approach from CCEA is very similar however it does state that the Governing Body are made aware of its role. The Head of QED advised that the College works with 39 awarding bodies and each requires a process and a policy that the GB approves, templates are already available, and the policies can be assimilated to keep the GB informed however she stressed it will take time to bring together into an oversight document for the GB, CCEA have asked for a return of the approved policy by 23rd April. The Head

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

of QED also asked members to note that the policy aspect is very important so that there is absolute clarity, and any claims can be dealt with appropriately.

The Chair stated the timeframe was very worrying and noted there are no planned GB or committee meetings before 23rd April to allow a robust discussion and approval process. The Head of QED advised the College is negotiating on the timeframe, time is also needed to negotiate around appeals (there are concerns over special considerations) and the advice is to assess students on how they are performing this year not what they would be likely to achieve.

Mr Pollard stated that moving away from academic judgement seems unfair on the academics concerned and enquired from a governance point of view what does this look like? The Head of QED replied that the policy reports to the SOP however some of this is blurred which is causing some concern. She stated that we do have a certain amount of confidence as a lot of work from students has been submitted, the concern is for the outliers and what is fair across the student body, she advised that she is anxious on the issue of appeals as there is not enough clarity. In terms of CCEA’s 5 step approach staff are being asked to make a judgement and more technical advice is coming through all the time.

The Head of QED also emphasized she was concerned about the awards made at qualification level, she explained that we are being asked to award at programme level and when a student receives their certificate it will not include a unit grade which is something Universities seek for admission, this may be accepted next year but what if a student wants to defer their place for a few years, she queried if this will be accepted or remembered.

The Principal stressed that this issue is in a state of flux and the Director of C&IS’s meeting with the Department tomorrow will put pressure on to get further clarity. He noted that the GB approval is required and that he will speak to the Temporary Chair offline to agree an appropriate approach as a date cannot be set currently for a special GB meeting. He asked the committee to note that whilst this is a stressful situation for staff and students, evidence has been banked that will enable a fair assessment however we also need to ensure the outliers also receive fair treatment.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Temporary Chair thanked CMT for the update and advised that the College and the GB are doing everything in our gift to address this matter and he was content to call a Special GB meeting to approve the process. He noted a request for an extension has been submitted to CCEA on the timeline and this may help with the current GB schedule of meetings.

In response to a query from Professor Woodside the Director of C&IS advised that those students requiring a placement are not on hold for a year as such, he advised that last year all students got through to the end and this was due to the dedication of the staff who were still completing assessments In August and September. The same will have to be done this year and whilst it causes issues logistically as the new cohort has started staff are totally committed to getting their students to the end.

Mr McCrum asked for further detail on the drop rate and enquired if there are going to be 39 different appeal mechanisms for the individual awarding bodies. The Director of C&IS advised that the drop out is localised to certain cohorts, he advised that some students have become fed up and others are dependent on their circumstances at home. The Head of Schools are encouraging students that are struggling to get a partial achievement and the Sector is seeking the Department to lobby local regulators to flag that this issue needs to be addressed now. On the issue of appeals it is unclear if each organisation will require a separate appeal mechanism.

Mr Pollard noted that the Director of C&IS has been updating the committee about this matter for several months and reported that the College has done its best to make others aware of the issues and we now find ourselves in a position where we are scrambling to make governance arrangements around it which is wholly unacceptable.

Mr Pollard also noted that the disproportionate impact the pandemic has had on women has been widely reported and now 90% of the 520 students we have impacted by assessments are women stresses that there is an equality issue that needs to be considered. The Principal confirmed that the issue of equality has been raised with the Department and hopefully a decision will be taken in balance by the Executive.

The Principal concluded by advising the committee in order to give them complete reassurance the College is engaging with every student to try and make them stay on programme, a task force unit has been created

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>in the College to dedicate resources to this. The Director of C&IS is actively working to address the issues with the Department and highlighting what mitigations the College requires.</p> <p>The Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support addressed the committee and advised that Covid is still impacting students. The nature of many CfC referral have been often serious in nature, many single parents have reported financial hardship, and some have no food, staff have been arranging for a small number of students to be fed on campus. She emphasized that the SERC staff have been working above and beyond to support students and extra staff have been brought into the pastoral care team to assist.</p> <p>The Chair thanked CMT for the detailed update and noted that some of the issues may be addressed by the Governing Body before the next meeting of this committee.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p>a) Action Points from the meeting held on 26th January.</p> <p>The Chair advised that all actions had been completed.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Correspondence:</p> <p>a) College Development Plans 2021/22</p> <p>The Chair directed members to the enclosed correspondence and highlighted that a CDP Commissioning Note had not yet been received.</p>
<p>4.</p>	<p>International Presentation on the College’s International activity and the impact of Covid</p> <p>On the invitation of the Chair, the Head of Quality, Excellence and Development presented an overview of the work of the International activity in the College. She gave a background on how the work commenced, current projects, future plans and the impact the pandemic has had on the work. Along with highlighting the strategic model of the international unit the committee were advised not only of the benefits to the College and its partners but also how individual students have benefited from their involvement.</p> <p>Following the presentation, the Chair commended the Head of QED on the excellent work and noted that it was very inspirational, she then invited members to ask questions and the following points were noted:</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- Professor Woodside noted that in the absence of Erasmus funding (due to Brexit) will future funding be similar? The Head of QED advised that the team have already completed an analysis of administration costs and it is similar, she advised that Erasmus did not cover full costs and so future funding will be similar.
- Mr Huddleston enquired if there is also a challenge around British Council funding, the Head of QED assured the committee that in her role as Chair of the International group she has formed a good relationship with Jonathan Ledger, TVET Specialist for the UK Government’s Department for International Trade Education Team, and he is able to keep her well informed, she advised that he is very supportive of the College’s efforts. In terms of British Council funding, she concluded there is likely to be a 30-40% reduction in funding.
- In response to a question from Mrs O’Hare around recruiting disadvantaged students to the projects, the Head of QED advised that the recruitment process is fair for all students and significant support has been provided to students in the past to enable them to take part.
- Mr Mackell highlighted that the past year has enabled the team to move a lot of delivery online and he enquired if there is any opportunity to engage in further online activity post pandemic. The Head of QED advised that online working has enabled the team to work quicker and develop programmes to adapt to not being able to travel, she advised that a recent programme has just finished in Uganda and the feedback has been excellent. Mr Mackell commended this work and noted that it is great for the College to demonstrate its resilience during this time.
- In response to a query from Mrs Fraser on how the projects are marketed the Head of QED advised the committee that the team use social media to highlight their work and the marketing team send out press releases to highlight the work, she advised that the current Japanese project has recently had coverage in the local media.
- The Principal advised the committee that along with the Head of QED he had been taking part in the British Council’s strategic review and he has advised that a closer link up is required to British Council, DIT and development funds. He advised the committee that despite the future challenges around funding he does not envisage the College withdrawing from international work, he advised that the work covers its own costs, and it has invaluable benefits for staff and students.

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>The Chair thanked the Head of QED for attending the committee to present the international team’s activity, she said it is very inspirational and thanked the Head of QED for all the work she does for the College on behalf of the committee.</p> <p><i>At this juncture the committee took a short comfort break (7.05pm)</i></p>
<p>5.</p>	<p>Employers -Presentation on Entrepreneurial and Employability delivery</p> <p><i>The meeting resumed at 7.10pm</i></p> <p><i>At this juncture the Head of School and Deputy Heads of Enterprise and Entrepreneurial joined the meeting.</i></p> <p>At the Chairs invitation the team presented an overview of their work and activity to the committee. They highlighted how Project Based Learning is embedded into the SERC curriculum and how students benefit by developing transversal skills whilst working on multi-disciplinary projects. The committee noted that the students are encouraged to develop their entrepreneurial skills in the College by developing innovative thinking and allowing students to create start-up businesses. In conclusion the Team showcased a video that will be used in the Green Gown Awards where the College has been nominated as a finalist in the Enterprise Category, the online ceremony will be held on 24th March 2020.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the team for their very informative presentations, she wished them well in the upcoming awards and opened the floor to members to ask questions.</p> <p>Mr Pollard commented that the work being carried out in this area was very impressive and it highlights how advanced SERC are in progressing enterprise as part of the curriculum.</p> <p>Professor Woodside echoed these comments and noted that it is great to see PBL being developed, he stated that CDIO is a worldwide concept that was started in MIT and it is wonderful that SERC are leading on this in Northern Ireland.</p> <p>The Chair thanked the team again for their hard work, commitment and stated she hoped they had given the newer members of the committee a flavour of what work is going on, she added a personal thank you</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>to the team as this is her last Education meeting and commented how much she had enjoyed working with them.</p> <p><i>At this juncture the Head of School and Deputy Heads of Enterprise and Entrepreneurial left the meeting.</i></p>
<p>6.</p>	<p>Social Inclusion – For Information and Discussion:</p> <p>a) Engagement Update Report Update</p> <p>The Director of Strategic, Planning, Quality and Support directed members to the written report, she highlighted that engagement has been very challenging throughout the pandemic, but the teams have been doing very well. The Director advised that applications for adult returner classes are healthy and this is a good indication of the engagement work.</p> <p>Mr Huddleston commended the work and noted that it is a vital piece of work for FE which is highly underrated, he stated that it was fantastic to see the breadth of work SERC has undertaking in engagement.</p> <p>In response to a query from Mr Mackell the Director advised that the creche in Newcastle is still operating and although it has been challenging staff have not had any Covid issues. She advised that two bubbles have been created with two staff members each to allow the creche to open if there were any need for staff or a child to self-isolate.</p>
<p>7.</p>	<p>College Development Plan</p> <p>a) Update on College Development Plan</p> <p>The Director of SPQS advised the committee that a commissioning note for the CDP 21/22 had not yet been received, however she would present a draft plan to the committee at their next meeting for review. She advised that in terms of meeting a September deadline for submission this will ensure the committee has sufficient time to consider the plan.</p> <p>b) Applications and Enrolments</p> <p>The Director of Curriculum & Information Services presented an overview of the current status of applications and enrolments, he directed members to the written report and highlighted that applications are performing well and in parr with the year before he last, he reminded members that the previous year suffered a delay with the new enrolment system.</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>The Director highlighted the report card in the report at section 1.8 that provides a comparison against the targets set by the Department, the committee noted that most of the targets had been met. The Director went on to advise that enrolment target for part time courses has not been met, and that the College had done extremely well in the pandemic to maintain the Full-Time target. He informed the committee that part time courses had suffered because of Covid, many classes had to be cancelled and refunds were provided, a focus on rebuilding the part time courses will begin next year.</p> <p>The Temporary Chair enquired if the Director had any sense of the scale of the challenge in rebuilding part time courses. The Director advised that once the College can run classes it can be rebuilt quickly provided there is not another lockdown, he also advised that an option had been given to people to defer payments instead of a refund so that they can avail of the class as soon as it is possible.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Higher Education:</p> <p>The Chair asked members to note that there had not been a Higher Education meeting since the last meeting and there were no further updates to provide.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Items for Information:</p> <p>a) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Report</p> <p>The Director of SPQS highlighted that the data in the written report relating to referrals which are Covid related captures anything to do with positive/negative test results and those who need to self-isolate etc She advised the committee that the non-covid referrals have been often serious in nature and range from mental health to financial issues. These issues sometimes need intervention from other agencies and the College have been liaising with them to ensure appropriate support is provided along with the College support. Some of the students are young carers and the team have been actively addressing the issues they face when they aren’t properly recognised as such and additional support has been provided to these students. The Director concluded that the course teams are doing their utmost to encourage students to remain on their course.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Policies for Review/Approval:</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

	<p>a) Student Carer Policy</p> <div style="background-color: #e0e0e0; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black;"> <p>Agreed: The Committee reviewed and approved the Student Carer Policy and recommended it for adoption by the Governing Body</p> <p>Proposer: Mark Huddleston</p> <p>Seconder: Gareth Hetherington</p> </div> <p>b) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Policy</p> <p>The Committee noted the updates to the enclosed policy.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Any Other Business:</p> <p>a) Chair’s Verbal Report</p> <p>b) QIP/SER Update</p> <p>The Chair invited the Head of Quality, Excellence and Development to provide the committee with an update on the Whole College QIP/SER. The Head of QED advised the committee that ETI had provided positive feedback and proposed Outcome A which is the highest achievement. The Chair commended the team on the work that had been put into the documents and noted this outcome was superb.</p> <p>At this juncture the Chair advised the committee that the Head of QED, Mrs Miller would be retiring from her post at SERC in August 2021. At this point the Chair advised she wanted to publicly acknowledge and pay tribute to the work Mrs Miller has done for the College. She passed on her personal best wishes and thanked her on behalf of the Committee for all her efforts. Mrs Miller thanked the Chair and thanked her for always supporting the work.</p> <p>The Temporary Chair echoed the comments and added his sincere thanks to Mrs Miller not only during his tenure as Temporary Chair but for her support during his entire time at SERC, he concluded by wishing her all the best for the future.</p> <p>The Principal commented that this evenings’ meeting marked an end of era for SERC as Mrs Reid had chaired her last Education Committee meeting. He stated that she was highly knowledgeable and focussed on excellence and had been absolutely critical in the development of the College in the ten years she had served as a Governor, he advised that she could not be faulted in her compassion and support she has always demonstrated to the College. He commended on her role in ETI inspections and advised</p>

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 23rd March 2021 at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

that the management team took comfort in the depth of her knowledge when representing the Board. He said that Mrs Reid has been a great ambassador for SERC and a critical friend, and she will be missed. In concluded the Principal acknowledged Mr Bodger’s contribution to the College particularly in relation to business engagement as his term comes to an end soon.

At this point Mrs Reid was presented with a commemorative plaque on behalf of the management team.

Mrs Reid thanked the Principal for his kind words and advised that her role with SERC had been both enjoyable and rewarding. She noted that the quality from the staff at SERC is truly remarkable and she thanked them for all their efforts. She advised that she was never nervous about presenting to the ETI during inspections because she was confident in SERC’s performance.

She said that during this last year she has especially missed being able to come into the campus buildings as everyone always warmly welcomed her and were always willing to share what they were doing with her.

Mrs Reid paid tribute to the leadership team, she advised she was always immensely impressed with their investment in their staff, and she had been privileged to be part of the SERC journey.

She thanked Heather Miller, Claire Henderson and William Greer for their help to her during her time in SERC.

As Chair of the Committee, she advised that it had been pleasure to work with Ken Webb, Heather McKee and Michael Malone and she would miss them.

Mrs Reid addressed the Temporary Chair and thanked him for his gentlemanly and insightful leadership, she told him that he had been a delight to work with. She thanked her colleagues on the Board and wished the newer members well in their roles, she noted that she has made many friends and they have brought a richness to her life.

Mrs Reid thanked Mrs Williamson for her support and concluded by saying she was hopeful this was not goodbye.

The Temporary Chair concluded the meeting by thanking Mrs Reid for her support to him personally over the last 2-3 years and added he was pleased she was leaving the College on a positive note.

Date and time of next meeting:



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**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the "Committee")
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It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 25 th May 2021, at 17:30 via Microsoft Teams Videoconference.
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The meeting was concluded at 8.03pm