

**Minutes of a meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)
held on Tuesday, 21st September 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: 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, Mr S Pollard, Mrs D O’Hare, Mr M Huddleston, Mr A McCrum, Mr D Stewart, Mr D Wilson, Dr D McConnell, Professor A Woodside, Ms M Corrigan</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), Ms A Frazer (Boardroom Apprentice)</p> <p>Apologies: None</p> <p>In the Chair: Mr Pollard</p> <p>b) Declarations of Conflict of Interest</p> <p>Mr Pollard declared his standing conflict of interest that his wife is employed at SERC in the payroll team, and he is employed by Ulster University. Ms Corrigan declared she is member of the CCEA Council and is employed at CCMS. Mr McCrum declared that his wife is an ETI Inspector and noted that he may be conflicted regarding item 3a on the agenda.</p> <p>c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 25th May 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: #f0f0f0; padding: 5px;"> <p>Agreed: That the Committee approved the minutes of the meeting held on 25th May 2021, and that the minutes be tabled for approval at the next meeting of the Governing Body.</p> <p>Proposer: Andrew Corbett</p> </div>

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At this juncture the Chair advised that, along with the Committee Vice-Chair, he has met with the Principal and Director of Strategic Planning, Quality & Support to review the Committee's Cycle of Business. In so doing he had taken on board the views of committee members who had provided feedback in advance of the meeting. He confirmed that the work plan is in line with the committee's terms of reference. Should any member wish to consider additional topics or wish to see fuller consideration of any topic they should please let him know.

e) Committee Terms of Reference

The Committee noted the Terms of Reference are reviewed annually, after a brief discussion it was agreed that no amendment would be required to the terms of reference, and they were fit for purpose.

Agreed: The committee approved the Terms of Reference and recommended them to the Governing Body for adoption

Proposer: Mark Huddleston

Seconder: Alan McCrum

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

On the invitation of the Chair the Director of Strategic, Planning, Quality and Support provided members with an update on Covid 19 activities and student support. She began by advising that onsite testing had not been progressed. The pilot had taken place in late June and July and while College processes had been successfully set up there were issues for all the Colleges with the DHSC APP not texting individuals the results of the test. Lateral flow testing is still being rolled out, terms and conditions need to be agreed on a monthly basis for the continuation of the testing.

The Director advised that the College are still delivering the same message to staff and students with regard to symptoms and the SOP has been revised to bring it line with the new restrictions set out by the NI

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Executive. As has been widely reported in the media there are issues with the track and trace system especially around those testing positive on day 2 and day 8, this is being kept under review and so the College is trying to maintain social distancing as much as possible in classrooms.

The Director of Curriculum & Information Services advised the committee that the College is maintaining the 50/50 approach for this academic year. He advised that while some Colleges are returning to 100% attendance, the management team feel that with issues that will inevitably come with Winter it is better to be prudent in planning a full return for staff and students.

Mr Mackell enquired if there was any contingency planning in place to host hybrid classes considering another lockdown may be possible? The Director advised that the plan is very much 50/50, this also allows the College to quickly flip a class online if there is a requirement for someone to isolate, by putting these classes online it will reduce the risk to others in the class, less people on campus means less exposure. He highlighted those classes with practical activities to complete will be prioritised and done as early as possible in the year.

Mr McCrum asked the Director if there was a clear definition of a ‘close contact’ and added it would be useful to get a sense if the College is an outlier in terms of the Sector with its approach. The Director of SPQS advised that in terms of a definition the College is adhering to previously agreed definition and the College is continuing to be more cautious, but it is working to ensure risks are mitigated. The Director advised that this is guidance from the Department and PHA have confirmed they are content the College’s system is robust and does not require close monitoring.

The Director of C&IS commented that he would not use the term outlier but use leader, the College have been cautious in planning however this has enabled more support to be given to students who need to study at home and staff training for online teaching has been a priority. The Director advised he is aware that a phased return to campus is not working for every College, it is a risky strategy as students are not prepared if a class needs to be quickly flipped online.

Moving on the Director of C&IS advised the committee that there are 4 students still complete qualifications from last year and one cohort of level 1 students are repeating the year, this is because of their experience of the previous year, and it is much more beneficial for them to repeat this year. He advised that enrolments

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	<p>have progressed well, and the College is working with Belfast Met to place students in Traineeships that they could not accommodate. Finally, the first two weeks of term will host the enterprise fortnight which will cumulate in the expo event, whilst social distancing will be maintained the event has been organised to keep classrooms together to create the buzz and atmosphere of the previous events.</p> <p>In response to questions from the Committee the Director advised that the Belfast Met students had been contacted by SERC to offer them a place with the College. He advised that the initial number reported was around 800 and this had been refined to 415, out of this number a number have already enrolled with SERC and a further 24 interested in joining SERC. A further text message will be sent to these students this week to ensure they can be accommodated. The Director highlighted that this is the advantage of online working as it gives a greater flex to configuration and has enabled the College to accommodate these students as spare space had been created.</p>
<p>2.</p>	<p>Matters Arising:</p> <p>a) Action Points from the meeting held on 25th May 2021</p> <p>The Chair advised that there were no matters arising from the previous meeting.</p>
<p>3.</p>	<p>Correspondence:</p> <p>a) ETI District Inspectors</p> <p>The Principal asked members to note the enclosed correspondence which sets out the role of the District Inspector and confirms that Margaret Duddy has been assigned to SERC. The Principal advised he had met Dr Duddy this week and will meet with her quarterly by way on an update. He added that there is an upcoming review of the Hubs in the Sector which should begin on 18th October.</p> <p>b) 2021/22 CDP Commissioning Note</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S advised members the note confirms the content that should be included in the CDP, she advised that the Department have been very prescriptive and sets out the changes to the education report card. The committee noted the correspondence and moved on to a detailed discussion of the CDP under agenda item 4a.</p>

4.	<p>2021/22 College Development Plan and review of related strategies -For discussion and approval</p> <p>a. CDP 2021/22</p> <p>b. Skills Strategy</p> <p>c. FE Response to Skills Strategy</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S began her presentation of the CDP 2021/22 by advising the committee that some of the figures still need to be included and the final draft will be issued to Governors ahead of the submission to the Department on Friday 24th September.</p> <p>The Director directed members to section 4 of the report which sets out SERC’s context, she asked members to note the remainder of the report is very prescriptive and the content follows the narrative provided by the Department. Members noted the challenges that have been set out on page 10 of the report that addresses the issue of an uncoordinated approach to Education in NI which the committee have been focussed on for some time.</p> <p>The Director asked members for feedback on the report and in discussion the following points were highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mrs O’Hare suggested that a definition around vocational areas would be useful within the report and to provide some examples around vocational courses in post primary. She advised it would be helpful as this report has a broader audience and the term vocational has a different meaning for many people. Mr Huddleston suggested the term TVET maybe more relevant which is a common term used across the UK. • Mr Huddleston noted that there is no reference to Green/Circular Economy, as this is a priority for the NI Executive, he suggested that it could be noted within the report. The Director of SPQ&S confirmed she could include a reference to it as there is no page limit with the report even though space is limited within the sections. • The Temporary Chair commented that he liked the report and is conscious of the set guidance to follow. However, he noted as this is a public facing document it would be of benefit to include outcomes, he advised if it cannot be included this time it might be worth speaking to the Department to include next time.
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- The Director agreed that this issue needs to be raised and reminded members that the Department had moved away from an Outcome Based Accountability approach for the CDP. She advised that the data is available so she will review the report and integrate it where she can.
- Ms Corrigan enquired if the report should be more specific when referencing awarding bodies and it may also be helpful to include the priority for the Sector to achieve awarding body status. The Director noted the suggestions and confirmed that she could include BTECs in the reference.
- Mr Huddleston enquired if the context of BTECs is around funding issues. The Director advised that post primary sector is not monitored in what is delivered so perhaps lends itself more to the FE Sector.
- Mr Huddleston advised in that case it might be pertinent to focus on a greener economy. He noted that whilst this is not the focus of the 10XC vision, the Department have published the Northern Ireland Energy Strategy 2050. It might be useful to include some examples of SERC’s work and focus on environmental issues and working towards net zero.
- The committee noted the Sector response to the 10X Strategy and in his capacity as Deputy Chair of the Department’s Skills Advisory Group (SAG) Mr Huddleston provided the committee with an update on how this will now be taken forward. He informed members that he had met with Jackie Henry Chair of the SAG to discuss the consolidated responses and the key themes coming through are around care returners and the disconnect between DfE and the Department for Education.
- Mr Huddleston advised that he had written a skills governance piece for the Department and the Colleges will have a place on a National Skills Council, the plan is that there will be an interim council in place sometime in October. He advised that the timeline is fast as there is a risk around the unstable political landscape and the collapse of the NI Assembly. He concluded his update by confirming that Department for Communities is fully engaged in taking this work forward.

The Chair thanked everyone for their contributions during the discussion and the Director for her work on the report.

Action Point: The Committee approved the College Development Plan 2021/22 subject to the discussed amendments being made and the latest data included. The final draft will be shared with members by email prior to the submission to the Department on 24th September.

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The Director of Curriculum & Information Services addressed the committee to provide a presentation on PBL and Transversal Skills, he highlighted the following:

- The Director began by giving the committee an overview of what T-Skills are and why they are becoming increasingly important in order for learners to adapt to changes and lead to meaningful and productive lives.
- The Director advised ‘The Northern Ireland Skills Barometer (2019) highlights a lack of non-technical, ‘soft’ or ‘transversal’ skills, such as communication, teamwork and problem-solving, amongst graduates. Businesses need graduates with these skills to help drive growth and innovation.’
- He explained the core domains for transversal skills and how the College had embedded them in the curriculum, he particularly highlighted how the structure of the new traineeships includes a T Skills assessment.
- The Director provided members with examples of T Skills and their supporting skills and advised that assessment will be through naturally occurring evidence along with evidence submitted by students through placements and extracurricular activities.
- In summary the Director confirmed that all 6 Colleges have committed to using the T Skills blueprint developed by SERC. Endorsement has also been given by the DfE Apprenticeship and Skills Team, DfE quality improvement team and ETI.

The Chair thanked the Director for his excellent presentation and invited members to comment, the following points were noted in discussion:

- The Temporary Chair commented this was an excellent piece of work and it was good to see a blueprint built around the Skills Barometer. The Director advised that the blueprint has been shared internationally particularly with a Canadian Polytech who are doing similar work and the level of overlap has been incredible.
- Mrs O’Hare noted this was a very impressive piece of work and highlighted that this can sometimes seem quite complex, but this blueprint is very straight forward. She enquired if the Director had considered the use of digital badges? The Director confirmed the College uses badges in the enterprise fortnight and will start to map this into the T Skills work.

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- Mrs Fraser added this work is a great way to add value to courses, she enquired if students don’t complete extracurricular activities is this to their detriment? The Director confirmed that those students who do not wish to complete extracurricular activities will be able to achieve a pass rate, they wont progress as much as the College would like them to so they will be encouraged to take part. He advised that self-assessment is the driver and there are no hurdles for students who do not wish to complete extra activities.
- The Principal added there is a huge amount of academic discussion of T Skills worldwide, he advised this is the first model of how to implement and assess them, as far as he was aware. He advised the committee that a phenomenal amount of work has been put into this work by the Director and his staff. He referred to the buy in from other Colleges in the Sector and advised the proposal is that SERC will carry out training for the Sector.
- He highlighted the opportunity to develop T Skills into advanced Techs and HE programmes. As with the Traineeships it will enable SERC to offer and reinforce distinct products.
- He concluded by putting his thanks on record to the team involved in the development of the blueprint and noted that this is a significant development for education.

The Chair commended the T Skills work and added it was great to such rigour in the methodology.

6. Social Inclusion – For Information and Discussion:

a) Engagement Update Report Update

The Director of SPQ&S presented the latest engagement report. She provided an overview of the main points within the report and advised that as the College are able to do more face-to-face engagement with the lifting of restrictions this will aid this work. She highlighted that the work is increasingly focussing on partnerships and so it is important internally to coordinate so that the same message and strategic priorities are being reflected across the board.

In response to a query from Mr Mackell regarding the utilisation of the Downpatrick campus the Director advised this is very much a work in progress. She advised that some courses have recruited better than others and the focus for the campus is on a bid for a Centre of Excellence. She advised that the bid was submitted to UKCRF and the College hasn’t been advised yet if the bid was successful. She informed

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members that the bid was multi-faceted and it is the College’s view to develop a centre of excellence to work with industry partners in that area.

Mr Mackell noted how successful the engagement work and development of the Newcastle Creche has been and enquired if a similar project can be done in other campuses. The Director confirmed it had been successful, but it was also on the back of intense engagement done in the area which took a long time to do. She advised that the College had worked with community groups in Newcastle and there is no network of groups in Downpatrick, this causes a difficulty, and the engagement work would have to redone from the beginning.

The Chair thanked the Director for the update and added this is a valuable area of work especially in relation to our civic contribution.

Action Point: The Director of SPQ&S will share the Centre of Excellent bid for the Downpatrick campus with the committee

7. College Development Plan**a) Applications and Enrolments**

In commencing his report, the Director of C&IS advised that all Colleges have been experiencing issues with the MIS systems and it is therefore hard to get a clear picture of the data, the College have been producing reports internally and then need to map them against the MIS reports. He advised that it may be around week 3 or 4 of term before the College is in a settled position that an accurate report can be provided to the Committee.

The Director moved on to provide a summary of the current application and enrolments, he advised that FE is down 255 from last year, he advised that some schools have increased their numbers this year and others have decreased, there has been a huge increase in the numbers enrolled for construction courses. Numbers have declined in Early Years, and this may be because placements had been very problematic for students during the pandemic.

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	<p>Referencing the data highlighted for the HE numbers the Director advised that HE enrolments has been difficult across the Sector. The College has a current deficit of 58 on last year, the MASN is 509, overall, the College is around 82% of its MASN and is performing much better than some others in the Sector.</p> <p>Mrs O’Hare commented that in terms of grade inflation higher conversations are needed with the Education Minister, she highlighted that optional units will create an additional pressure next year and we should be thinking of how to influence that now. The Director agreed and added that there has been on reduction in the amount of work the College has had to deliver and would like to be able to influence the DoE Minister. Mrs O’Hare concluded by acknowledging that it is difficult to engage with the Minister and another route such as the tertiary education group may be a better forum to raise this issue.</p> <p>The Principal added a consolidated return of enrolments had been issued in the Governing Body papers. He highlighted that although some of the numbers are down the College has seen strong growth where there is a distinct product.</p>
<p>8.</p>	<p>Higher Education:</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S informed members that the HE Review Board will start meeting again in October (it had been postponed during the pandemic) and the minutes will be presented to the committee for review at the next meeting.</p>
<p>9.</p>	<p>Items for Information:</p> <p>a) Safeguarding, Care and Welfare Report</p> <p>The Director of SPQ&S directed members to the written report and highlighted proposals to enhance learner support.</p>
<p>10.</p>	<p>Policies for Review/Approval:</p> <p>a) Student And Trainee Performance, Behaviour And Disciplinary Management Policy</p> <p>Members were asked to note the policy had been reviewed and no changes were recommended.</p>
<p>11.</p>	<p>Any Other Business:</p>



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	No other business was discussed.
	<p>Date and time of next meeting:</p> <p>It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled to take place on Tuesday, 16th November 2021, at 17:30, venue TBC.</p>

The meeting was concluded at 7.35pm