

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

**Agenda Item 1: Chair’s Business:**

**a) Attendance and Apologies for Absences:**

**Present:**

Mr Gareth Hetherington (Temporary Chair of the Governing Body), Professor Alan Woodside, Mr N Bodger, Mr Andrew Corbett, Mrs Barbara Larkin, Mrs Heather Reid, Mr Steve Pollard, Mrs Karen Fraser, Mr James Lee, Mr Ken Webb (CEO/Principal), Miss Mollie Richardson, Mrs Deborah O’Hare, Mr Alan McCrum, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Darren Stewart, Dr Daniel McConnell, Mr Mark Huddleston

**In Attendance:**

Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body)  
Mr Tommy Martin (Chief Finance Officer (“CFO”))  
Mr Paul Smyth (Chief HR Officer (“CHRO”))  
Mrs Kathryn Cochrane (Boardroom Apprentice)

**Apologies:** None.

**In the Chair:**

Mr Hetherington

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

The Temporary Chair invited members to declare any known or perceived conflicts of interests. Mr Pollard noted his standing conflict of interest, in relation to his wife’s employment in the Finance Department of SERC and asked that it was noted he is an employee of Ulster University. The Temporary Chair noted his wife was employed as Financial Director to the DfE and he was also an employee of the Ulster University. Mrs Fraser declared that she was an employee of Queen’s University Belfast. No other conflicts of interest were declared.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

**c) Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020:**

The Governing Body reviewed the Minutes of the Meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020. Following due consideration, it was agreed that the Minutes were a true and accurate reflection of the Meeting.

**Agreed:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Governing Body, held on 28<sup>th</sup> September 2020, be approved, and adopted.

**Proposed by:** Andrew Corbett

**Seconded by:** Steve Pollard

**d) Matters Arising/Action Points from previous Meetings:**

It was noted that there were no Action Points arising from the previous meeting held on 16<sup>th</sup> November 2020.

**Agenda Item 2: Correspondence:**

**a) Letter from Beverley Harrison re Communications Strategy**

The Temporary Chair asked members to note the enclosed correspondence and highlighted that the letter is a commissioning note for a Sector Communications Strategy, he advised that the funding for the strategy will come from individual College budgets, a brief discussion took place, and the following points were noted:

- The Principal addressed the meeting and provided a brief background to a communications strategy, he advised that it had been explored before as it was agreed there was no concise picture of what Further Education is, the previous plan was not taken forward due to issues with funding. He noted that some changes in the proposed plan are strategic however the College’s current marketing budget is solely used for enrolments. He has in his capacity as Chair of the

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

Principal’s Group written back to the FE Director to advise that where a College has a distinct offering, they are not subject to the same enrolment pressures.

- In response to a question from Mr Huddleston the Principal advised that the purpose and driver behind the strategy is to ensure that there is less duplication in the advertising of enrolment days. However, he highlighted that there are local reasons why Colleges hold these sessions at different times of the year. He advised that as FE is so broad it should articulate what is being offered.
- The Principal advised that the next steps in the project are to tender for a public relations agent for the Sector and a working group will be established to discuss the details of the plan, the group will be made up of the Principals and some of the Governing Body Chairs have also expressed an interest in sitting on the group.
- The Temporary Chair enquired if there was any indication how much of each of the College’s individual budgets will have to be contributed towards the work. The Principal advised the FE Director has agreed to additional funding but at this stage nothing has been agreed on the individual budgets, he noted that any contribution will have a negative impact on enrolments as the value of the marketing budget has been cut year on year, he stated the Sector could find that they are promoting themselves strategically with no funding to properly promote open days which are critical for enrolments.
- Mr Pollard advised that he would be reluctant to give up the College budget for something that is strategic when the articulation is not clear. The Temporary Chair suggested that this should be reported back to the FE Director and the Principal confirmed he had already and was waiting on a further update from her.
- Ms Cochrane highlighted that a central website would entail more work for the customer as they would have to navigate through a site to find their local College, she also expressed concerns around the cost and development time for both Colleges and the customer. The Principal noted that an overarching site would require every College prospectus and it would be difficult for customers to navigate through them. He further advised that as the College is still known locally as the ‘tech’ it would add an additional layer to any communications and ultimately will hinder the communications work of all the Colleges.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- The Temporary Chair asked that the Governing Body’s concerns were fed back to the FE Director and the Governing Body would keep a watching brief on this work.

**b) Letter from Beverley Harrison re Congratulations to SERC re Network of the Year Award**

The Principal highlighted that it was great to see the College’s achievements recognised and he had written to the individuals involved to congratulate them. The Temporary Chair passed on the Governing Body’s congratulations to all those involved.

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

On the invitation of the Temporary Chair the Principal provided a brief overview of his written report, the following points were highlighted:

- The Principal informed members that in terms of applications and enrolments there is no clear relationship between each, and it is difficult to produce a formula to monitor the numbers as there are so many variables. He noted that if the application numbers do start to fall behind the previous year trend the management team will review the processes and monitor them closely.
- Moving onto the College response to Covid-19 the Principal advised that the Northern Ireland Executive will be producing a roadmap for coming out of lockdown on the week commencing 1<sup>st</sup> March and this will hopefully enable the management team to gain clarity around students return to campus.
- The Principal provided a brief update on qualifications and advised that OFQUAL will be making an announcement this week on arrangements for their assessments which will aid the College in advising students what they need in terms of gathering evidence and assessments. In response to a question from the Temporary Chair the Principal confirmed that he was more content with the approach taken from the awarding bodies as it is moving forward however, he stressed it is a shame that the process had taken so long as it put an immense amount of pressure on both students and staff.
- The Principal directed members to the presentation that had been given at the recent Accountability meeting with DfE and he noted that no issues had been raised in terms of the

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

College’s performance. The Temporary Chair added that it was an extremely positive meeting and there been a lot of recognition and gratitude from the Department on the College’s response to Covid. He advised members that he had taken a lot of assurance from the meeting.

- The Principal moved on to highlight that the 14-19 project board has recommenced in November 2020 and the first board meeting had been held. The Principal notes that a 6<sup>th</sup> form policy is still required, and he believed this work should be progressed aside from the 14-19 project. The Temporary Chair advised that he and Mr Huddleston had attended the Skills Advisory Group earlier in the day and he was encouraged by the importance placed on the work by the Permanent Secretary.
- Mr Huddleston agreed that this was a significant piece of work and he also noted the strength that the Permanent Secretary had brought to the session, he noted that a focus on careers and not qualifications did not make sense and so there are major challenges in taking this work forward.
- Mrs Larkin suggested that instead of FE’s qualifications trying to be equated she suggested that the Sector should try to get a standalone position. Members shared the frustration around this issue and noted that there has been no meaningful change in decades. Mrs Reid concluded that whilst she shared Mrs Larkin’s view equivalency is important especially in the workplace and a bigger piece of work should be looked at in terms of communications around the matter.
- The Principal moved on to highlight that the College is beginning the registration process with Open University to use them for foundation degrees. He also advised that the DfE Advisory Group working on the review of HE met recently, however, papers have not been shared with the wider Sector and this has been challenged to ensure there is transparency in the work.
- The Principal directed members to the report and the update provided on TfS and Traineeships. He advised that the new traineeship programme will be in place for September 2021. He highlighted that the new programme is funded differently through grant in aid funding which will mean that if an individual leaves their course during the year there will not be an in-year loss of funding rather the College may receive reduced funding the following year.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- The Principal concluded his update by advising members that the College is still successfully delivering on Essential Skills with 4043 enrolments in 2019/20, this is the not only the highest in the Sector but is more of an achievement because the SERC region does not have the highest proportion of the population that require ES. Mr Pollard noted that this is something to be proud of as there is still an issue recruiting people to this level, the fact that the College recruitment area has fewer numbers requiring ES in terms of demographics but has achieved such success demonstrates that something is being done right. The Temporary Chair agreed and asked that the thanks and gratitude of the Governing Body be passed onto the ES and outreach team.

**Agenda Item 4: Items for Approval**

**a) Evaluation of the Effectiveness of Quality Improvement Plan 2019/20 & Quality Improvement Plan 2020-21 for Further Education, Higher Education and Work Based Learning**

Mrs Reid, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the document for approval on behalf of the committee. She advised the committee had worked through the document at their previous meeting and were content to recommend it for adoption.

**Agreed:** 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 was approved and adopted

**Proposed by:** Gareth Hetherington

**Seconded by:** James Lee:

**b) Redundancy Compensation Terms**

Mrs Larkin, Chair of the Finance and General Purposes Committee, advised that the committee had reviewed the terms at their previous meeting. She asked members to note that it is prudent for the College to have agreed redundancy terms in place and this is normally done on an annual basis.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

However, because of the Voluntary Exit Scheme in place it had not been necessary, the scheme has now ceased and so the terms set out need agreement for 2020/21.

**Agreed:** The Redundancy Compensation Terms were approved and adopted

**Proposed by:** Gareth Hetherington

**Seconded by:** Alan McCrum

**c) Audit Committee minutes from meeting held on 11th November 2020**

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

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr Pollard and seconded by Mrs Fraser.

**d) Education Committee minutes from meeting held on 24th November 2020**

Mrs Reid, Chair of the Education Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mrs Fraser and seconded by Professor Woodside.

**e) Finance and General Purposes minutes from meeting held on 12h November 2020**

Mrs Larkin, Chair of the FGP Committee, presented the minutes for adoption.

**Agreed:** The minutes were adopted on the proposal of Mr Corbett and seconded by Mrs Reid.

**Agenda Item 5: Policies for Noting or Approval:**

**a) Mental Health Policy**

Mrs Larkin, Chair of the FGP committee, presented the policy for adoption. She advised that the committee had reviewed the policy and were informed it was a new policy which had been identified in the HR quality improvement plan. The policy has formalised the support already in place regarding the mental health work undertaken by the College.

**Agreed:** The Mental Health Policy was approved and adopted

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

**Proposed by: Heather Reid**

**Seconded by: Mr Corbett**

**b) Working from Home Policy**

Mrs Larkin presented the policy for approval and advised the committee had been content to recommend it for adoption. She highlighted that the College have recognised that post Covid the working environment will be different, and so the policy formalises the arrangements for employees seeking home working on a more permanent basis.

**Agreed:** The Working from Home Policy was approved and adopted

**Proposed by: Alan Woodside**

**Seconded by: James Lee**

**Agenda Item 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 the current report shows the College’s expected financial performance for the year up to the end of March; and its forecast for the year ending July. The report outlines that financial performance is on target for the March year-end (to meet the approved Resource Allocation of £38,811k) and is on-target to meet the July yearend target of £39,531k.

In terms of the March year end the CFO advised that there is a slight reduction in income and £1.3m of Covid spend, however all of the spend has been secured from the Department.

The CFO highlighted that the July year end variances are different to the March year end, for example the income is £80k less as these accounts are recognizing the impact Covid has had. Commercial income



**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

has decreased as the activity has clearly been impacted however this has also been mitigated as skills intervention has increased.

In terms of expenditure payroll has increased, this was expected and is in line with staff pay awards and the duration of the pandemic. The CFO highlighted that resources have had to be increased in terms of staffing to ensure that social distancing can be maintained.

The CFO advised that an IMPMS meeting had taken place earlier in the day on the period 6 accounts. He advised that the forecast is still on track and he was very confident that both year end targets will be met. The CFO advised that a number of funding initiatives for students have been confirmed by the Department including a £500 payment for HE students and data poverty payments. The Principal added that the £60 payment towards data/broadband is for full time students and a business case has been submitted seeking a similar payment for part time students. The Department have confirmed that both the £500 and £60 payments can be accrued if the college has not facilitated payment by 31 March 2021.

The Temporary Chair enquired if the payments will put additional pressure on the finance department. The CFO advised that the payments will be made electronically, and his department have been prepping for the rollout in the last few weeks, he advised that whilst there will be some administrative effort, he is encouraged by the Department’s flexibility around the payment dates.

In a response to a query from Mr. Stewart the CFO advised that the July year end does not include assumptions that students will be back on site, he noted there would not be a significant difference however some assumptions have been included around reduced footfall and the increased security and cleaning will be in place until at least the Summer months.

**b) Disposal and Retention SOP**

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Principal asked members to note the enclosed SOP and added that this was a Sector SOP that had been prepared by the Sector Working Group. The SOP had been signed off by the Permanent Secretary before and is registered with the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The Principal added that this working group works extremely well, and the College’s Data Protection Officer is a Chair of the group.

In response to a question from Mr Mackell the Principal advised that all staff have access to the SOP through the Learning Engine app and is part of mandatory training for staff. The Data Protection Officer will perform mini audits to stress test the mechanics of the policy and is also there to provide advise to staff on disposal and retention. The Principal concluded that the SOP will be reviewed by internal audit as part of the wider piece on GDPR.

**c) Staff Governors’ Reports:**

The Governing Body noted the written report provided by Mr Lee, Corporate Staff Governor.

Mr Corbett observed that teaching staff have been finding it difficult to keep students engaged while conducting online learning. He stated that typically at this time of year after the Christmas holiday period there is usually a pattern in students that they become less engaged and the increasing pressures of the pandemic has added to this. He gave assurance to members that staff have been spending additional time to ensure that students remain engaged. Mr Corbett also added that there was a concern around the lack of clarity from awarding bodies on examinations, but that FE is in a strong position in terms of evidence gathering, he concluded that the impact of the pandemic will have an impact on the intake of next years students who will have been out of a formal education setting for a year.

The Principal added that there was a particular concern this year around engagement and the College has focussed on courses at risk and measures have been taken to engage with these students including bringing some students onsite to realign the course. He advised that Know and Shows had been held and he was greatly heartened by the level of enthusiasm demonstrated by staff and that the team at SERC Extra have put an extra focus on student engagement.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

The Temporary Chair noted that the Governing Body need to be assured that students are not disadvantaged by online learning and the impact on students around the uncertainty of exams. The Principal advised that in terms of exams the College has been gathering evidence from students from the start of the academic year so that the College is in a strong position when the awarding bodies seek submissions. He concluded that the College will have a focus on providing support to next years intake of students to ensure that they are prepared in all aspects of learning.

**d) Student Governor Report:**

On the invitation of the Temporary Chair, Miss Richardson spoke to her written report. She began by echoing Mr Corbett’s comments regarding engagement and advised that the Students Union have been working to engage with students and encouraging them to motivate each other. The Students Union have therefore created online groups for different interests to give students a place to engage and feel connected.

Miss Richardson highlighted that the £500 Covid Relief Grant from the NI Executive excludes FE students and she has worked with NUS-USI to lobby local MLA’s to change this decision to get equality for all students during this pandemic.

**e) Audit Committee briefing on meeting held on 20<sup>TH</sup> January 2021:**

Mr Mackell provided a brief overview of the business conducted at the recent meeting; the following points were noted:

- He began by advising that the meeting was the first with the new compliment of committee members which had been very welcome in terms of experience.
- The Committee were presented with the Strategic risk register and a presentation from the Director of Strategic Planning Quality and Support on the operational risks in her directorate. The committee noted that in terms of strategic risks the PSD project is progressing well and despite a slight time slippage the project has gained pace and handover from PSD should be a smooth transition.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the "GB")  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- The committee also noted that despite £1.9m pandemic related costs the financial forecasts are still on target which was more than satisfactory.
- Internal Audit presented a report on Student Welfare which received a satisfactory rating and reflected the commendable work by the senior management team in this area.
- The Committee received an update on the Annual Report as there was a technical point outstanding regarding how the College disposes of land and buildings. Both PWC and the NIAO have confirmed this point has been resolved and the Annual Report should be signed off by the end of February by the Comptroller and Auditor General. The Chief Finance Officer confirmed that the Annual Report had now been signed and laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

**f) Finance, General Purposes and Staffing Committee briefing on meeting held on 19<sup>th</sup> January 2021:**

Mrs Larkin addressed the meeting to provide the highlights from the recent committee meeting, the following points were highlighted to members:

- The committee received the Annual Health and Safety presentation from the Head of Health and Safety which included the normal statistics on accidents, insurance, and audits along with the College's response to Covid.
- The Chief Human Resources Officer provided an overview of the employee healthcare scheme, members noted that the focus for the scheme is now on mental health as this is the biggest cause of staff absence.
- Mrs Larkin concluded her report by advising that the committee had recommended the two policies for approval that had been discussed under agenda item 5 and the normal finance and HR business was discussed.

**g) Education Committee briefing on meeting held on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2021:**

Mrs Reid provided an update on the recent meeting and asked members to note the following:

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

- The Committee had another Q&A session with management on the impact of Covid. She advised that the committee were more than content that the College has gone above and beyond their role to push regulators to confirm arrangements on qualifications.
  - The Committee were informed that 750 PCs were on loan to students which was a fantastic achievement, an update was also provided on the plans for the IT equipment post Covid.
  - The Director of Strategic Planning, Quality and Support had informed the committee that the commissioning note for the College Development Plan had not been received yet and an update was expected at the next meeting. The Committee were keen to build in the online learning element to the CDP. The Committee also received an update on the current CDP and were satisfied that all outcomes have met their targets.
- f) Mrs Reid moved on to advise that the committee had reviewed and recommended 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 for adoption, as discussed under agenda item 4a earlier in this meeting. She advised that committee members were keen to include an evaluation of effectiveness of online learning for next years report.
- In concluded her report Mrs Reid advised that the committee reviewed the standing item on safeguarding and will continue to monitor this closely during the pandemic.

**h) Minutes of the Chair’s Working Group meeting, held on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2021:**

The Temporary Chair advised that the minutes were provided to members for information. For the benefit of the new members the Temporary Chair gave an overview of the role of the working group and advised that these minutes are shared to ensure there is transparency in the groups discussions.

**7. Any Other Business:**

No other business was discussed.

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Governing Body (the “GB”)  
held on Monday, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2021 at 17:30 (GMT) via Microsoft Teams Videoconference**

**8. Confidential Business:**

*At this juncture, Messrs Corbett, Lee, Mrs Cochrane and Miss Richardson left the meeting. [19:34]*

A separate note was taken for this item.

**Date of next Meeting:**

The next meeting of the Governing Body is scheduled for Monday 26<sup>th</sup> April, 17.30, via Microsoft Teams

**There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 20.13**

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

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

Temporary Chair of the Governing Body