



SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

Minutes of a Meeting of the Education Committee of the Governing Body (the “Committee”)

held on Tuesday 8th April 2025 at 17:30, in LRC, Lisburn Campus

1. Chairs Business

a) Attendance and apologies

Present: Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body) Items 4-11 only, Mr Tommy Martin (Principal & CEO) Items 2C-11 only, Mr Samuel Hagen, Mrs Carolyn King, Mr Alan McCrum, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Derek Wilson, Dr Danny McConnell, Mr Steven Lee, Mrs Nuala Reid, Mrs Pauline Leeson, Ms Catherine McKay, Mr Michael McQuillan Items 3-11 only, Mr Darren Stewart Items 1-9 only, Mr Chris Bruton (Student Governor)

In attendance: Mrs Heather McKee (Deputy Principal Planning Performance and Engagement) Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr Gary Ritchie (Deputy Principal Curriculum) Mrs Emma Carson (Acting Director of HR & Facilities), Mr Andrew Emmett (Acting Director of IT & Finance), Mr Noel O’Hare (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development), Ms Catherine Shipman (Head of Engagement) Items 1-4 only

Apologies: Mrs Nicola Wilson, Ms Grainne McVeigh

In the Chair: Ms Corrigan Items

b) Declarations of Conflict of Interests

The following conflict were declared:

- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by CCMS whose sponsor department is DENI. She is a current member of the Governing Body of Stranmillis College.
- The Principal & CEO declared his daughter was a part time lecturer at the College.

- Mr Lee declared his wife was a Deputy Head of School at the College.
- The Deputy Principal Curriculum declared his wife and sister-in-law were both employed at the College.
- Mr McQuillan declared he is Chief Executive of Enterprise NI and a board member of Invest NI.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts.

c) Minutes of Education Committee meeting, held on 4th February 2025

Minutes previously issued to all members.

The committee reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 4th February and agreed they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting. The minutes were agreed on the proposal of Alan McCrum and seconded by Nuala Reid.

d) Matters Arising

The Secretary highlighted there were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting.

2) Correspondence

a. Essential Skills Enrolments and Outcomes in Northern Ireland Further Education Colleges: 2019/20 to 2023/24

The Deputy Principal Planning, Performance and Engagement talked to the correspondence enclosed and advised that this is useful data for the College and has been summarised well. She added the report has shown there are still too many people leaving school without a level 2 qualification and it is being left for the FE sector to address this issue.

b. Further Education Sector Activity in Northern Ireland by Local Government District: 2019/20 to 2023/24

The Deputy Principal advised the Committee this report will be useful to use in the upcoming strategy day. She noted SERC have a higher level of enrolments compared to the sector on core delivery. She added that SERC also has consistently higher achievement rates than the other colleges.

In response to a question whether enrolment figures would ever reach the pre-covid figures, the Deputy Principal highlighted the demographics, and while there has been a population increase there has also been a significant increase in competition from schools to retain pupils. She advised that while full time enrolments have increased it would be difficult to reach the pre 2020 figures.

At this juncture the Principal & CEO joined the meeting.

c. Skills Barometer

Members were advised that this edition of the Skills Barometer highlighted there is a skills shortage across the board and there is a need to increase supply. The Deputy Principal PPE advised the College's curriculum offering is well aligned to meet the increasing demands however the College should also interact with fast growing areas such as AI.

In response to a member's question on how students are prepared for work the DPPPE explained how soft skills are at the core of delivery in the College through Project Based Learning and transversal skills.

3) ETI Step Up Report

Papers previously issued to all members.

The Head of Quality, Excellence and Development presented the final report from ETI on the Step-Up programme. The Head of QED highlighted some of the main findings of the report to members including the effective self-evaluation process in place in the College, staff are supportive and responsive to learners' needs, there is a well-considered range of learning and teaching approaches, and effective planning of delivery allows learners to access appropriate entrance level programmes.

The Head of QED further highlighted that one of the main key findings was the positive impact of the college's well-considered and tailored provision for learners enrolled on the various strands of the project is contributing positively to the College's and the Department's strategic visions for economic development and social inclusion.

Overall, the Head of QED said the College was extremely pleased with the positivity in the report. The Chair thanked the Head of QED and asked that the Committee's thanks and congratulations were passed onto the staff.

4) Engagement and Development

At this juncture the Chair of the Governing Body joined the meeting.

On the invitation of the Chair the Head of Engagement addressed the Committee and provided a comprehensive overview of the work across student and community engagement. She highlighted recent success, challenges facing the teams and planned work for the future.

In discussion the following points were highlighted:

- In the beginning the discussion, the Chair commended the Head of Engagement on the work being done across the teams, and impressed with the work and that her passion shines through when she is speaking about her work. She highlighted that this work is not just about enrolment figures but the impact it has on the individuals, which is transformative.
- In response to a question if there was any correlation between accessibility for potential learners in the Ards peninsula, the Head of Engagement confirmed there is, and she has met with Translink to lobby for change to the local transport links. She advised that she has also engaged with a community transport hub and the DART partnership in Kircubbin, to work alongside them to provide a better transport service for learners.
- The Chair of the Governing Body enquired if other Colleges are taking a similar approach to engagement as SERC. The Principal advised that the College has a strategic focus on engagement and social inclusion and the approach may be different to others in the sector, but he highlighted that each geographical area has different needs that SERC tailor their approach to.
- The Head of Engagement added that SERC takes a much more community development approach and the focus is on building trust and working in collaboration with stakeholders.
- Members noted that in particular Downpatrick is an area of deprivation and queried why some of the learners are being failed at school level. The Head of Engagement advised that the College are working with the Clanrye Community Network on a focused youth programme. The RAISE programme has also been introduced, and its aim is around parental engagement, based on modelling learning in the home and the impact this has on children.
- In response to a question from the Chair whether there is celebration events held for the Step-Up programme the Committee noted that there are classroom-based celebrations at the end of the programme. This is an opportunity for participants to reflect on what they have achieved, and the College will then help learners onto the next stage of their journey whether that is with the College or not.
- Members suggested that these stories could be publicised through the marketing team, however the Head of Engagement advised that some participants would be reluctant to put their face to the campaign, but she could look at doing this in a more creative way.

The Chair thanked the Head of Engagement for her attendance and wished her and the team well with their work.

At this juncture the Head of Engagement left the meeting.

5) Strategy Day Planning

Papers previously issued to all members.

The Deputy Principal, Planning, Performance and Engagement provided an update on the recent focus groups held with staff, she advised that so far 6 out of 8 have been completed with 105 staff registered to attend. Members noted that staff have raised a range of issues and have welcomed the opportunity to have their say.

The DPPPE advised that the Deputy Principal Curriculum has met with the student representatives and the student surveys have been circulated.

The information gathered from the focus groups and engagement with students will be collated for the Strategy Day on 19th May. The Principal added that in taking account of the qualitative environment it is hoped this is a fresher approach to the Strategy.

6) College Development Plan

Papers previously issued to all members.

A) Applications and Enrolments

The Deputy Principal Curriculum talked to the written report provided at 006A, which provided an update on the College applications and enrolment figures, he highlighted the variances in the report and the current enrolment figures.

In beginning the update members noted that there are 1000 more applications received than the same period last year and there are 26 first preference applications for Higher Education through UCAS.

The DPC advised that overall full-time enrolment figures are performing well and he is confident that the final figures will exceed last years, the College has seen a 16% growth over the last two years. He added that with the growth of the Business Services offering there has been a reduction in evening learners, the College is therefore starting to look at the demand for micro-qualifications to try and remove barriers to part-time learning.

In response to a question from a member on staff capacity if there is an increased curriculum, the DPC confirmed that the College are delivering more with less capacity, and he would like to use part time lecturing staff to ensure the correct skill set is in place. He advised members that the curriculum plan will take account of capacity, and this will be presented at the next meeting for review.

The Principal added that the next few months will be extremely challenging as the anticipated budget for 25/26 will have a substantial reduction and so the College need to review what can be delivered, the permanent staff structure and if what we deliver meet the Minister's priorities and the wider economic needs of the community we serve.

B) QIP Update

The Head of QED presented an update on the Quality Improvement Plan and provided a comprehensive summary of the actions taken to date on some of the areas.

Action: The QIP 24/25 will be presented to the Governing Body for review and approval

7) Higher Education/Further Education

Papers previously issued to all members.

a) HERB Minutes 03.04.25

The minutes from the recent HERB meeting were reviewed and approved on the proposal of Nuala Reid and seconded by Carolyn King.

The Chair noted that she was pleased to see the UCAS applications that have been received, and it will be interesting to keep a watch on how AI impacts the College, as there are possibilities to support administrative staff as well as learners.

8) Items for Information

Papers previously issued to all members.

a) Engagement Report

Members noted the report at 008A.

b) Safeguarding Report

Members noted the update report at 008B. The Deputy Principal PPE advised that a detailed analysis of Learning Support was included in the report. Members noted the sizeable increase in the number of students requesting Learning Support over the last ten years and enquired why the budget has not increased also.

The DPPPE advised that unfortunately there has not been an increased budget, but the College are very creative in managing the resources available. The Principal added that support funding has not kept pace with the level of demand.

9) Policies for review

- a. Curriculum Policy
- b. Higher Education Admissions Policy
- c. FE Admissions Policy
- d. Interim Policy for Students with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
- e. Safeguarding

Members noted that the policies had been reviewed and required no substantive changes for approval.

10) Students Union Constitution

The Student Governor presented an overview of the proposed changes to the constitution and an explanation for each of the proposed changes. He highlighted the last review had been done in 2016 and so a lot of the constitution was simply outdated.

Action; Committee requested a fully tracked version of the SU Constitution was presented to Governing Body for approval on 17th April

11) Any other business

No other business was discussed, and the Chair closed the meeting at 7.10pm