



SOUTH EASTERN REGIONAL COLLEGE

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

held on Tuesday 23rd September 2025 at 17:30, Lisburn Campus

1. Chairs Business

a) Attendance and apologies

Present: Mr John Nugent (Chair of the Governing Body) Mr Tommy Martin (Principal & CEO) Mr Samuel Hagen, Mr Alan McCrum, Ms Majella Corrigan, Mr Derek Wilson, Mr Steven Lee, Mrs Nuala Reid, Mrs Pauline Leeson, Ms Grainne McVeigh, Ms Cathy McKay

In attendance: Mrs Heather McKee (Deputy Principal Planning Performance and Engagement) Mr Colin McGuckin (Deputy CEO), Mrs Claire Williamson (Secretary to the Governing Body), Mr Gary Ritchie (Deputy Principal Curriculum), Mr Noel O’Hare (Head of Quality, Excellence and Development), Mrs Nicola Wilson, Mr Trevor Breadon (Head of School, School of Built Environment) Item 6 Only, Mrs Emma Finney (Head of Business Engagement) Item 5 Only, Mr Stuart Rankin (Head of Higher Education) Item 8 only, Mr Mark Brashier (Student Governor elect)

Apologies: Mr Paul Finnegan

In the Chair: Ms Corrigan

The Chair welcomed Mr Brashier to his first meeting and noted that he was attending to observe before his term as Student Governor officially begins on 1st October.

b) Declarations of Conflict of Interests

The following conflict were declared:

- Ms Corrigan declared she is employed by 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, and his son is enrolled as a student.
- Mr McCrum declared his wife is employed by ETI.

No action was taken in relation to any of the declared conflicts. The Chair reminded members to declare any potential conflicts should they arise during the meeting.

c) Minutes of Education Committee meeting, held on 17th June 2025

Minutes previously issued to all members.

The committee reviewed the minutes from the meeting held on 17th June 2025 and agreed they were a true and accurate reflection of the meeting. The minutes were agreed on the proposal of Derek Wilson and seconded by Nuala Reid.

d) Matters Arising

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

e) Committee Annual Report

The Secretary advised members that as part of the Governing Body's role in ensuring we are compliant with all aspects of The Partnership Agreement, each committee will produce an annual report. The Education Committee report will be presented for approval at the November meeting and will form part of an overarching Governance report.

The Secretary provided a brief overview on the proposed format of the report. Members confirmed that the proposed format was sensible and agreed to feedback on the draft report.

f) Committee Terms of Reference

The Secretary presented the terms of reference for review; she highlighted that amendments had been made to reflect the important work on engagement. The Chair added that the terms of reference are more aligned to the strategic pillars agreed in the review of the College Strategy.

Agreed: The committee approved the amended terms of reference on the proposal of Alan McCrum and seconded by Pauline Leeson.

g) Education Committee Vice Chair Expressions of Interest

The Secretary advised that one expression of interest had been received from Nuala Reid for the post of Vice Chair.

Agreed; Mrs Nuala Reid was duly elected as Vice Chair of the committee with immediate effect on the proposal of Pauline Lesson and seconded by Derek Wilson.

2) Correspondence

Papers previously issued to all members.

a) Direction to Colleges on Strategic Plans

The Principal talked to the enclosed correspondence; he highlighted this is a new process as the College has not previously submitted a Strategy to the Department for approval. Members noted the predicted timeline for the approval process. The SERC strategy will be approved by Governing Body before being submitted to the Department.

b) PAC Report Developing Skills for NI Future

Members noted the enclosed report and the Principal highlighted there are some relevant points for Further Education in the recommendations.

3) ETI Reports

a) Traineeship Evaluation

The Deputy Principal talked to the ETI report and provided a brief summary of the findings and recommendations. He highlighted the more negative tone of this final report from the draft originally received, particularly around the recommendations on Essential Skills.

The Chair and Mr. Wilson both added that they were disappointed with the final report, having sat in on the feedback session with ETI. The final report does not reflect the positive verbal feedback from that initial session. It was noted that the SERC report indicated more positive outcomes than the sector report.

The Principal advised that this is the fifth draft of this report, and the College has asked for factual amendments throughout the process.

4) Final Strategy Update

The Deputy Principal Planning, Performance and Engagement advised that the final document is still in progress and will be available for approval at the Governing Body meeting on 7th October. She

provided an overview of the changes the creative developers are making to the presentation of the document and advised that the draft she has viewed looks visually excellent.

In concluding the update the DPPPE provided a summary of the strategic pillars and advised how they have been presented within the document.

The Chair thanked the DPPPE for her work on this project and noted the committee look forward to the final draft.

5) Update on Marketing and Prospectus

At this juncture the Head of Business Engagement joined the meeting.

The Head of Business Engagement presented an overview of the Marketing team's recent activity along with the objectives for 2025/26. The committee commended the success of the recent graduation event.

In discussion, members noted that tracking outcomes from marketing activity can be difficult. This year the team are trying to simplify the process, which should hopefully aid the overall quality of the work.

The Deputy CEO suggested that updated videos of the facilities would be an excellent opportunity to showcase what is on offer in the College, as he has been extremely impressed with all the campuses in his new role. The Head of Business Engagement will take this up with the team to progress.

At this juncture the Head of Business Engagement left the meeting.

6) Head of School Presentation

At this juncture the Head of School Built Environment joined the meeting.

The Head of School provided a detailed overview of the School of Built Environment, including the team structure, areas of curriculum covered, the achievements and current challenges and future curriculum plans.

Members enquired about recruitment challenges and the requirement for staff to have a L5 qualification. The HoS advised that the College could apply to DfE for flexibility on this on a case-by-case basis, however the starting salary for lecturers is a barrier in getting people to apply for roles.

In response to how to address these challenges, the HoS advised that the College are actively 'growing our own' where recent graduates from the school may get a technician job and then move onto a lecturing role.

There was a discussion on the challenges of aligning growth with staff and space and solutions that had been developed to support delivery space for courses.

Members supported the sector is actively lobbying the Department on the withdrawal of funding for competitions, agreeing that this will impact future opportunities for cohorts coming through the school.

The Chair thanked the HoS for attending and advised the committee had been keen to get an update on the outworkings of the consolidated schools and that it had been an extremely useful input for members to understand the operating context.

At this juncture the Head of School Built Environment left the meeting.

7) College Development Plan

Papers previously issued to all members.

a) CDP 25/26

The DPPPE presented the draft College Development Plan and highlighted this is the third draft of the report. Members noted the Departmental request to increase targets for student numbers and enrolments. The Principal advised that if this request continues to be made year on year it will be difficult to achieve with less resources and declining demographics.

The Chair of the Governing Body advised that he had recently met with the Minister, and she had advised that the College need to target growth and be as ambitious as possible, however, she was very content with the current performance figures.

b) Applications and Enrolments

Members were asked to note the enclosed report for information. The DPC highlighted the key changes and, in particular, the 4% increase overall in enrolments. Members welcomed the 14% increase in the Higher Education enrolments and commended the efforts made in recent years to grow these numbers.

The DPC advised that there was a positive increase of 5% in the Downpatrick campus which is really encouraging.

c) QIP update

Members noted the QIP update, and the Head of QED highlighted objectives that may not be met.

d) Traineeship QIP Update

e) Essential Skills QIP Update

The Head of QED presented the enclosed action plans. In discussion the following points were noted:

- The plans draw from the recent ETI reports and informed sector wide QIPs for both areas.

- A series of objectives were identified by reviewing the SERC feedback along with the other Colleges.
- In discussion members noted concerns regarding the suitability of GCSE as a progression route. It was noted that such a requirement may not be the right choice for all learners.
- Members expressed concern over the Essential Skills findings. In response the DPC highlighted the importance of measuring at the point of need and noted the existence of multiple workstreams across the sector.
- Members queried how all elements fit together and how outcomes will be achieved. The Principal explained that Internal Audit (IA) and ETI will review progress within 18 months. In the interim, various working groups and the Traineeship Project Board will monitor developments. The Principal advised that he is a member of the project board.
- Members questioned whether the 50% target was too high in terms of the objective in increasing uptake and achievement in GCSE maths.
- The Head of QED suggested criteria should be established to determine suitability for the GCSE route, particularly for learners with high D grades. Progression pathways should be considered to assess whether GCSE supports better outcomes.
- In response to a question on how staff morale is with the impact of the ETI report, the DPC confirmed that the approach involves meeting all teams regarding the QIP and managing what is within the organisation's control, while also acknowledging wider societal challenges impacting on ES outcomes.
- The Principal noted efforts to improve the relationship with ETI to ensure mutual understanding. Feedback from inspectors on the ground has been positive.

Action: The Committee requested a briefing note on Essential Skills and GCSEs for the next meeting and proposed a summary dashboard using RAG ratings for ongoing monitoring of the QIPs

8) Higher Education/Further Education

a) UCAS Pilot Update

Papers previously issued to all members.

At this juncture the Head of Higher Education joined the meeting.

The Head of HE talked to the written report provided. He advised the UCAS pilot has been extended by another year, this will allow more data to be captured to determine if the pilot's true success.

Members agreed that with the increase in HE enrolments not continuing with UCAS at this point would be premature.

The Head of HE advised there have been valuable lessons learned in this first year that will allow the College to put measures in place to better support coming year applicants.

Members noted that departmental funding has been withdrawn to continue with UCAS which is a cost of approximately £45k.

At this juncture the Head of HE left the meeting.

9) Items for Information

Papers previously issued to all members.

a) Safeguarding report

The DPPPE asked members to note the written report, she highlighted the challenges facing Learning Support due to the ever-increasing demand in provision with no funding uplift. Members noted the updated format for the report.

b) Engagement report

Members noted the report which detailed the activities undertaken recently by the engagement team.

c) Business, Innovation and Partnerships report

The DPPPE reminded members this is a new report for the committee which sets out the work of the Business Services team. Members noted the finance mapping across the activities in the report which was useful.

10) Policies for review

No policies were presented for review.

11) Any other business

No other business was discussed.

12) For noting

a) Consultation report on extending compulsory education to age 18

Members noted the enclosed report. The Chair highlighted that consultation responses noted concerns around funding and how the assessment model will be developed to support a mandatory requirement for young people to stay on in education and training to age 18.

No other business was discussed, and the Chair closed the meeting at 8.30pm.