

Mrs Harrison informed on a variety of reviews taking place at Department level, and advised that a paper on Higher Education in Further Education was presented to the Minister in the previous weeks. She stated that she hopes for the programme to be reinstated shortly.

Mrs Harrison advised that the review of 14-19 is due to start in October 2020 and informed that work is ongoing to finalise the plans to implement the new traineeships in September 2021 with entry level and level 1 provision to be provided by colleges and other training providers. Mr Saunders informed on his concerns that HE will be affected by inflated results and in turn impact on enrolments. Mrs Harrison stated that there was unlikely to be any policy change on HE in FE until September 2022. Members enquired if the Department had progressed any arrangement for the future funding of traineeship through the core grant. Mrs Harrison stated that she will make enquires offline.

A10. APPRENTICESHIP RECOVERY INITIATIVE

Discussion took place regarding the DfE apprenticeship recovery scheme and the various financial incentives under the return, retain and result scheme.

Members noted the importance of engaging with employers and stated that it would be beneficial to discuss concerns with the Director of Apprenticeships, Careers and Vocational Education Division.

Mrs Wilson arrived at the meeting at 17.58.

Mr Doran stressed the need for maximum flexibility and good engagement to ensure that concerns are relayed to the appropriate bodies. Mrs Harrison advised that some sections are limited in their ability to change within existing Policy positions, informed on a number of positive engagements taking place across departmental divisions to review new operational requirements for training and concerns to be taken into account regarding the safe resumption framework.

Prof. O'Hare remarked on the exceptional nature of the FE landscape, consisting of a huge number of moving parts. He expressed concern on the impact of inflated grades, the potential of a replication of the situation in the next awarding period and the difficulty that may be presented to SRC in honouring provision and maintaining a diversity of expertise. He informed on discussions taking place at Board level and the opinion raised that HE is an important facet of what the College offers.

Mrs Harrison confirmed that the points raised have been expressed in a document to the Minister and advised that the skill barometer has identified a skills shortage at level 4 and 5. She commented that the sector should take the opportunity to be involved in shaping the provision and encouraged Principals to reflect on how best to promote the unique selling point of HE in FE.

Mrs Harrison informed of her engagement with a variety of policy leads and welcomed the opportunity to put forward opinions with a view to influencing decision making.

Mrs Harrison remarked on the big piece of work undertaken in regard to assessments and qualifications, advised on engagement with the Minister to sign off the mandate and correspondence issued to Essential Skills deliverers. She informed on positive outcomes regarding ES and stated that her deputy Donna Blaney hopes to be in a position mid-October to issue the new operating framework for ES.

Members welcomed the new regulatory ES framework however expressed concern that the same momentum does not appear to apply to vocational qualifications. Members stated that due diligence should apply if further disruption should occur in the weeks and months ahead, and consideration given on instruction to staff on any revisions to the regulatory

framework and the need to deliver a flexibility in assessment approaches used by awarding organisations.

Mr Kilpatrick advised on reservations expressed within the Task and Finish Group. He informed on distress conveyed that the College may end up in a similar situation next year with the perception that NI will simply fall behind the instruction of OFQUAL without due consideration to the NI position. He stated that he is not privy to any definitive timeline aside from ES and lacks confidence that other provision strands are moving through a proper ordered and engaged process.

Members recommended inviting Mr Wilkinson to a future meeting of the Principals Group to facilitate discussions on concerns raised.

Mr Redmond expressed concern for a lack of engagement with the end user stating that had a better understanding been attained by awarding organisations through effective consultation with schools and colleges then many unfortunate circumstances may have been avoided. Members acknowledged the need for contingency planning to provide staff with an agreed framework and for a coherent approach to be adopted by awarding organisations.

Members thanked Mrs Harrison for her attendance, attention and guidance.

Mrs Harrison left the meeting at 18.26.

Mr Saunders informed Members of a meeting of the Chairs Group on 1 October in which he will relay Members' concerns.

A04. MINUTES OF THE GOVERNING BODY MEETING HELD 25 AUGUST 2020

The minutes of the Governing Body meeting of 25 August were reviewed for accuracy and unanimously approved on the proposal of Mrs Wilson and seconded by Mr Turner.

A05. MATTERS ARISING

Members noted that all matters arising have been addressed.

Members remarked that they are happy with the method of distributing papers via the dedicated SharePoint site.

A06. CHAIRMAN'S BUSINESS

None.

A07. COLLEGE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

Mr Doran advised that the College Development Plan is usually submitted in March and informed that given the extraordinary circumstances, uncertainty on student intake and with the agreement of DfE, submission had been delayed to 24 September.

Mr Doran referred Members to the document and challenges associated to regional catchment areas and residual student qualification issues. Mr Kilpatrick provided a status update on the completion of adaptive assessments and informed that the affected students fall within the faculties of PRSE and BUTE in areas including hair, beauty and construction trades. He informed on the challenges of social distancing, confirmed that effective communication is taking place with the learners and advised on measures taken to progress students onto apprenticeships.

Mr Doran

Members agreed that it is critical that the regulator CCEA represents the NI position with awarding organisations and a long-term solution and clear approach be taken to address vocational qualifications.

Mr McCormick cautioned that the regulatory role and that of an awarding organisation should be separated.

Mr Doran provided an update on student intake and the consequence on decisions associated with A level grading and those taken by local universities to offer unconditional places prior to results being issued, the introduction of foundation year courses, combined with the increased number of places allocated to universities. Mr Doran stated that this, inclusive of the lowering of entrance requirements for degree courses, has resulted in learners who had previously applied for and been accepted by the College, opting to take up an offer elsewhere. He informed that as a consequence, the intake on full time higher education to the College has reduced by over 120 compared to September 2019.

Mr Doran notified that the period of lockdown has led to a dramatic impact on apprentice opportunities across a significant number of areas and stated that of the initial 38 HLAs furloughed, 34 has still not returned to work. He informed that out of the initial 308 level 2/3 apprentices furloughed, 72 had still not returned to work.

Members were advised that approximately 50% of employers who had previously indicated that they would be recruiting in September 2020 have now withdrawn their apprenticeship offers, and that the College also faces significant challenges in finding suitable placements for trainees across most strands of Training for Success.

Members were provided with detail on schools engagement and community outreach programmes and the impact of social distancing leading to split class groups.

Mr Doran referred Members to the Whole College Planned Activity. Discussion took place regarding the financial liability on smaller class sizes and need to be flexible across qualifications.

The CDP was approved on the proposal of Mrs Thompson and seconded by Mr Turner.

A08. BUDGET POSITION

Mr McGonigal advised Members of a letter received from the Department on 14 September responding to the sector's concerns over financial implications associated with the pandemic, at an estimate of £10.7m. He confirmed that the Department have provided financial support and funded £4.6m, with SRC to receive £1.3m to address costs to date. Mr McGonigal stated that FE Finance will commission a refresh of the funding exercise in October.

Mr Turner noted that the SRC Finance Team should be commended in securing the funds, remarking on the strength of the bid and monitoring process.

The Governing Body noted the report.

A09. RESUMPTION OF ON-SITE DELIVERY

Mr Doran provided an update on the resumption of on-site campus delivery and new measures in place. He advised that the student body are largely adhering to the wearing of face coverings.

A13. COVID PROCESS

Mr Doran informed that the NI Covid app has been launched and would be made available to under 18's at the end of September and that this has been promoted to the student body.

He advised on the PHA's allocation of home Covid test kits and informed that the PHA Education Support team would extend their reach to include universities and colleges. This would now require the College to identify close contacts on campus and report this to PHA.

Members noted the report.

A11. OFFICIAL OPENINGS – ARMAGH AND BANBRIDGE CAMPUSES

Mr Saunders advised that the Banbridge and Armagh new builds are open and operational and events to mark the occasion have been scheduled for 23 October and 11 November. He remarked that further localised lockdowns may prevent the events taking place and it may be preferable to extend the celebrations. Mr Doran agreed to monitor the situation with the Department.

Members noted that due to social distancing the College have put plans in place to limit interaction and this in turn has created restrictions on the guest provision.

Members were asked to confirm their availability to attend either event with the Secretary by close of business 23 September.

Governors

A12. CO-OPTION PROPOSAL

Mr Saunders referred Members to the proposed procedure for the appointment for co-opted Governors. He advised that Mr Carson and Mrs Campbell will be coming to the end of their second term of office in February 2021 and thanked them for their sterling work and dedication to the Governing Body.

Members were asked to complete and return the skills matrix to the Secretary at their earliest convenience together with suggestion on additional skillsets to assess.

Governors

Mr Redmond, as a Member of the Finance and General Purposes Committee remarked that given Mrs Campbell's valuable contribution to the Board, it is critical that the Board retain experience that would rightly be provided by a qualified accountant and finance professional. Members concurred with Mr Redmond's observation.

Mr Nugent remarked that general finance training across the Governing Body would prove beneficial.

Miss Armstrong

The procedure was approved on the proposal of Mr Nugent and seconded by Mr Redmond.

A14. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

A15. DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the full Governing Body is scheduled for 17.30 on Tuesday 3 November 2020.

The meeting concluded at 20.08.

CHAIR

DATE