

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee
held on 19 January 2016
at the Sheepen Road Campus

Present

David Gask, in the Chair
Alison Andreas

Christopher Bridge
Bryn Morris

In Attendance

Caroline Fritz	Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement
Hazel Paton	Clerk to the Governors
Jason Peters	Assistant Principal: Curriculum
Tom Toolan	Dean of Higher Education (item 7 only)
Jill Wognum	Vice Principal: Curriculum and Quality

Apologies for absence were received from Will Chapman.

1. **Declaration of any conflicts of interest**

None.

2. **Minutes of the Last Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 October 2015 (CIC/CQ/16/1/1) were received and confirmed. The Chair signed the minute book.

3. **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

3.1. **Enrolments**

Governors asked the latest position on enrolments and were advised that there had been no major changes since the December Board meeting. A few more apprentices had been enrolled, and a teacher training course starting in February will potentially bring in 15 more higher education students.

Governors asked what had been done to address the issue of small class sizes. It was reported that the College was now able to run reports that give a complete breakdown of class sizes. The reports showed that the situation was worse than anticipated, particularly at Braintree. Work started with the Directors of Faculty before Christmas to merge classes wherever possible without disrupting the student experience. This work is continuing with a health group due to merge at the end of January. There are some very small groups in functional skills as a result of students going on to GCSEs, and some of these have now been merged. The Vice Principal: Curriculum and Quality and Assistant Principal: Curriculum will work on efficiencies going forward to prevent this situation recurring next year.

4. **Update on Scorecard**

The Assistant Principal: Curriculum used the live data in Scorecard to report the current College performance 2015-16 in terms of student progress in-year. It was reported that staff had updated their estimates on the likely achievement of students during the first week of January. The next update will be after half term (during week commencing 20th February), with a final update in May.

It was reported that the College was doing well on most measures, but two required urgent action. Retention is very good at 96%, but attendance is currently 85% compared to the College target of 90% and more needs to be done to improve this. Most of the attendance issues are around English and math, both GCSE and functional skills; there are no significant issues around attendance on the main qualification.

The predicted success rate (main qualification) is currently 93% against a College target of 88%. Courses that have differentiated grades (Pass, Merit, Distinction) are doing very well and the predicted grade profiles for D*-M are currently ahead of the national average. Staff tend to be conservative around predicting a top grade at this stage of the year but 28% of Level 3 students are predicted to achieve D*-D. For courses that are graded pass/fail, 95% of students are currently predicted to pass. Attendance will be a factor in predicting a fail grade.

In response to a question it was confirmed that Scorecard provides College management with in-year data that they have not previously had access to, updated daily. Other colleges have similar tools, but Scorecard is thought to be better than average as a management tool.

English and math were discussed. Governors asked if there were still difficulties recruiting English and maths teachers and were advised that the College had been very successful in recruiting in this area. The challenge for staff is dealing with very large mixed classes of largely demotivated students. Governors asked if there were any differences between campuses and were advised that attendance at Braintree is worse than at Colchester but this is not a factor overall. Governors noted the target of 28% for GCSE maths and English and asked how the College's experiences and results compared to others in the sector. It was reported that many colleges are struggling. The colleges that seem to have done well in this area offer A Levels as well and already have a strong team of very experienced teachers and a culture of students doing academic qualifications alongside vocational courses.

It was reported that the area of most concern is functional skills where the predicted results are significantly lower than last year. Governors were advised that functional skills are more difficult this year with a different examined element. Also students were given a screening test this year and those with Grade E GCSE have been put on Level 2 function skills, which is a stretch for a lot of them. The Vice Principal: Curriculum and Quality, Assistant Principal: Curriculum and Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement will be meeting with the Area Heads to look at the issues around functional skills and how to address them. In response to a question it was reported that functional skills is taught in the vocational areas, but the students are not necessarily with their peers on their main qualification.

In summary performance was currently good for retention and achievement. The College priority is English and math.

5. One Year Action Plan and Key Performance Indicators – September 2015 – August 2016 (ambitions 1 and 2)

CIC/QC/16/1/2, Update on One Year Action Plan 2015-16 – Ambitions 1 and 2, was received and considered, with a particular focus on the actions of greatest importance (red) where progress was slow (red).

Governors asked about the new marketing strategy and were advised that a strategy has been produced and a lot of work was currently being done to update it.

The plans for a smooth enrolment process were discussed. It was reported that everything is going well for September 2016. The issue is that this year the period between the publication of GCSE results and the start of term is short (5 working days) compared to previous years (8 working days).

Governors asked how the impact of actions was evaluated, for example around Citizenship, and were advised mechanisms included learning walks, group tutorial, and student/parent/employer feedback.

6. **Improving Teaching and Learning 2015-16**

CIC/CQ/16/1/3, Teaching Observations – December 2015 report, was received and considered. It was noted that the College was not doing as well as it had hoped and Governors asked what was being done to address this. It was reported that a lot of staff have been engaged recently in staff development but changing the culture and patterns of teaching behaviour is proving very difficult. Learning walks were held the previous week to try and establish development needs. Much of this has to be driven by middle managers, who have been given a lot of development, but are not yet consistently rigorous enough in their approach to improving teaching and learning.

Governors asked what is expected of staff whose lesson observation is not judged to be of the standard required and were advised that they have to engage in a programme of development. Staff in most need of development are allocated a learning coach and improvement strategy. Governors asked about the process of action planning and were advised that as part of the process of being observed, everybody has an action plan, produced in conjunction with the line manager. From the observations that have been undertaken, the College is concerned about the progress of 22 people who will be re-observed. Governors considered how they know if teaching has improved during the year. It was reported that there is evidence to suggest that there a link between attendance and good teaching. Another indicator will be the May prediction in Scorecard.

Governors discussed how the Board could support the College Executive in reinforcing the importance of aspirational teaching. It was suggested that link Governors could follow this up during link visits as part of their discussions on teaching and learning. It was agreed to consider this further at the February planning meeting.

7. **HE Performance 2014-15 and update on 2015-16**

The Dean of Higher Education gave an oral report on the main findings of the Periodic Review and the University's feedback on the Institutional Annual Review. The action plan from last year's Annual Review was completed in full although some points (recruitment, retention, achievement, progress and good degrees) have been carried forward because of their strategic importance.

In 2014-15 the percentage of students getting a good degree increased by 1% on the previous year, continuing the five year trend of year on year improvements. The numbers of graduates in employment was also better than the previous year. There is a concern about the mix of part time and full time employment which is reflective of the economy and there are hot spots of unemployment such as creative industries. Some areas, such as graphic design and the performing industries, are predominantly self-employed.

Overall success rates increased from 76% to 86% in the last year. In terms of widening participation, 66% of students are from backgrounds that are challenging. This figure is significantly higher than many universities and equal to or better than colleges that deliver higher education. The College has been ambitious in setting its benchmark group as mixed economy colleges and other universities of equal status.

The number of staff that are members of the HE Academy has increased from 5% to 25% in the last six months and will continue to increase.

Risks and uncertainties include:

- potential changes to the Student Opportunities Fund which feed into access agreements. It is unclear what the Government is going to do;

- student fees. Changing fees is not an easy process and the College has opened negotiations with the Office for Fair Access;
- recruitment;
- retention – first year and in year retention;
- overall achievement;
- student attendance;
- good degrees;
- periodic reviews - the College failed to validate one programme last year and has a heavy periodic review and validation timetable this year;
- efficient and effective use of teaching resources. Stoke by Nayland Golf Course is to be used as an alternative site for the delivery of Management of Sport and the College wants to validate Braintree as an alternative site of delivery;
- complaints – the College does not receive many complaints;
- National Student Survey results – results (67%) increased by 1% on the previous year. Areas of poor performance (Computing and Health and Social Care) are being addressed;
- Marketing;
- assessment feedback (timeliness);
- module evaluation

Governors were advised the top risk was recruitment and retention and asked whether this was due to demographics or competition. The issue is competition and discerning customers who know what they want. The College has programmes that have not changed for a considerable time. The programme of periodic reviews provides an opportunity to examine programmes and turn them into something new and existing. This year all Business and Management programmes will be subject to periodic review and revalidation. The College also carries out curriculum reviews which look at the curriculum and what progress is being made to address employer needs, students needs etc. Periodic reviews and curriculum reviews are carried out in partnership with the University of Essex.

Another issue is the HE Green Paper which has major implications for college based higher education. The Green Paper envisages four levels of teaching excellence, which will be linked to what institutions can charge for fees.

Governors asked if the quality processes for HE were the same as FE and were advised that there are peer review and a development plan but the peer review system will have to change because of the teaching excellence framework.

It was noted that the opening up of the market has meant that high ranked institutions are now recruiting from the same student base that the College has traditionally recruited from. Over the last two years the College has struggled to recruit full time students but has been able to grow its part time numbers, bucking the national trend of falling part time recruitment. Governors asked how far part time recruitment could grow to offset the risks of falling full time number and were advised that the emphasis is on revitalising the curriculum to make the full time offer as appealing as it can be. More also needs to be done to maximise internal progression. The importance of developing courses that meet current employer needs was discussed and it was reported that the College is started to set up employer panels for each curriculum area who will work with the curriculum team to develop the curriculum.

Governors asked about opportunities for graduate apprentices and were advised that there is the potential to offer a significant number of higher apprenticeships. Arising from the discussion it was noted that the College's in year progress measures do not currently include apprenticeships and appropriate progress measures how to include apprentices will need to be looked at when the system is updated.

8. **Annual Report to the Board**

CIC/CQ/16/1/4, Curriculum and Quality Committee Annual Report 2015-16, was received, considered and accepted for submission to the Board.

9. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday, 15 March 2016 at 4.30 pm

10. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.

Part II – these minutes are not confidential but the supporting papers are confidential

11. **Safeguarding Report**

CIC/CQ/16/1/5, Safeguarding Report January 2016, was received and noted.