

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee
held on 27th May 2020

Present

Keith Moule, in the Chair
Alison Andreas
Pam Donnelly

Lizzy Ellam
Kevin Prince
Terry Smyth

In Attendance

Maeve Borges	Vice Principal: Student Services and Support
Caroline Fritz	Assistant Principal: Quality, Teaching and Learning
Hazel Paton	Clerk to the Governors
Jason Peters	Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance
Jill Wognum	Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

1. **Apologies for Absence**

There were no apologies for absence.

2. **Declaration of any conflicts of interest**

None

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 29th January 2020 (CIC/CQ/20/2/1) were received and confirmed.

4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

5. **Outcome of QAA Review November 2019**

CIC/CQ/20/2/2, QAA Review of Higher Education, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality. The review took place over a three month period. A significant number of documents were requested prior to an onsite visit. The review team were on campus for three days gathering evidence; this included discussion with a range of staff and students.

The Committee noted the findings in the draft report and the College's response to the draft report. The Committee were pleased to note a good outcome to the review, which had focussed on four areas:

Q1: Admissions (condition met; high degree of confidence)

Q5: Student engagement (condition met; moderate degree of confidence)

Q6: Complaints (condition met; moderate degree of confidence)

Q9: Student outcomes (condition met; high degree of confidence)

Discussion focussed on the two areas where the conditions had been met with a moderate degree of confidence. In respect of complaints, the College has a range of validating bodies (University of East Anglia, University of Essex, University of Huddersfield, and Pearson) and different arrangements are in place in line with the requirements of each validating body. The review team had picked up that the complaints section on the website of the University of East Anglia did not match the College's paperwork.

The College Executive agreed that the judgement in respect of student engagement was fair. At the time of the review the arrangements for a Higher Education Students' Union were not in place, and there was not always good representation at meetings. This is being addressed.

The Committee asked if the two judgments that had been met with a moderate degree of confidence would place any limitations on the College going forward. It was confirmed that the conditions have been satisfactorily met and there are no limitations.

A member observed that there appears to be a growing chasm between QAA and Ofsted in the philosophy and practice of review/inspection. The QAA experience had been very different to that of an Ofsted Inspection. Staff were not allowed to ask questions or seek clarification on what they were being asked; there was no feedback at the end of the visit; there is no clear information about what the judgements are based on; and there was a significant delay in issuing the draft report. In contrast there is a very close dialogue between Ofsted and the organisation being inspected, and it is very clear what providers are being judged on.

The previous QAA review cycle is no longer in place. Future reviews could be triggered if there is a perceived change in quality measures, for example a drop in student outcomes or an increase in complaints, or if the College is included in the random sampling of 5% of registered providers each year.

6. Report from FE Commissioner Visit February 2020

CIC/CQ/20/2/3, FE Commissioner Diagnostic Assessment monitoring visit report, was received and presented by the Principal. There was one recommendation arising from the visit in respect of Governor involvement in the self-assessment process which was considered as a separate agenda item.

The timing of the visit shortly before the campus closure due to the pandemic is helpful, should it be necessary to demonstrate that both quality and finance were in a good position before the disruption to College business. This has been acknowledged in discussions with the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).

The Corporation Chair, Committee Chair and Terry Smyth were thanked for their involvement in the meetings with the FEC team.

7. Performance 2018-19

7.1. January/March 2020 Performance Tables

CIC/CQ/20/2/4, January/March 2020 Performance Tables, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance. It was noted that the College's performance was representative of the profiles of other colleges graded Good.

The improvement in progress scores in English and maths was particularly pleasing. The next target is to get English to close the gap on maths. Writing is a greater challenge than maths for students in areas such as construction. Governors asked if there was much discrepancy between learner groups. The College continues to be more successful in GCSEs, where a student can show progress, than in Functional Skills which are pass/fail.

Governors asked how the results for this year would be affected by the cancellation of the summer examinations and awarding of grades based on teacher assessment, given that awarding bodies will look at historical pass data. It was reported that before the calculated grades are submitted they have to be checked to see how they compare to our historical profile. English teachers suggested the profile would be similar to previous years. In maths an extensive standardisation exercise has been

undertaken to bring the grade 4 rate down to a realistic level. The College is not looking to grow its figures by more than 3% to 5%. Governors were concerned that this could potentially penalise students doing well in a year that they are not able to take exams. It was reported that Ofqual will look at other evidence such as SATS result. If the student's profile is not one that is strong statistically it will count against them.

7.2. **National Achievement Rate Tables**

CIC/CQ/20/2/5, National Achievement Rate Tables for the 2018-19 cohort, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance. The overall achievement rates put the College in the top quarter of colleges (all programmes), and the top 6% of colleges for 16-18 FE learners. There was also an improvement in the achievement rate of adult learners, but not as strong as 16-18 learners. The College continues to offer an adult curriculum that meets local needs but which includes subjects such as accountancy where there is a high failure rate. The figures also include delivery through the Learning Shops and a significant number of ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages) learners where in-year data shows the College is already making significant progress. The College was expecting to see a further improvement in student achievement this summer.

In respect of English and maths, Governors asked if the changes and improvement in attendance this year compared to previous years could be taken into consideration if the calculated grades the College wanted to award this year were higher than prior years. That is not a factor that Ofqual will look at.

Governors asked how the College was preparing for what could be a very rapid change in the skills profile across Colchester and North East Essex as a result of the pandemic. It was reported that the focus to date had been on the switch to online delivery and keeping students moving forward, with work on the new curriculum just starting. There is a proposal for a new course in digital media next year, and there will be new courses with the launch of Health and Care wing. From discussions with other colleges it appears that there has been less impact so far on apprentices here than elsewhere but that may not remain the case. The College may need to look at other ways of meeting employer needs, and the balance of full cost and apprenticeship provision might change. The first learning when the College re-opens will be full cost delivery for employers, with gas and electrical safety courses planned to start from mid-June. The Learning Shop might benefit from the move to online learning, with more people accessing the new digital skills for life and for work curriculum.

A member reported that there is a need across the local authority for skills in environmental health and a level of understanding about track and tracing. This is seen as a three to five year programme of work. This was noted by the College Executive.

The College is looking at how it can help people access many of its courses amid concerns about social distancing. In particular the Full Cost Team are looking at developing retraining opportunities online rather than coming on site.

The Committee was reassured that the College had responded appropriately, adapting the delivery of the curriculum to meet current demand and with good communication systems in place with local industry to receive their feedback.

The Ofsted monitoring visit report commented that some teachers were not effectively supporting learners with their literacy. This had been discussed at the last meeting, and the Committee asked what progress had been made. It was reported that an outline plan had been developed but had been overtaken by the need to focus on supporting staff to become effective teaching online. This will have a more significant impact on learners at the current time.

8. **Current Performance including in year Progress**

8.1. **Education Programmes for Young People**

CIC/CQ/20/2/6, Current Performance, including in year progress - Education Programmes for Young People, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance.

It was reported that at mid-March 2020, the tracking data was in line with the previous year, suggesting it would be another good year, for both young and adult learners. The College will retain the data for use during an Ofsted Inspection, but there is uncertainty over how Inspection teams will view this data. All accountability measures have been suspended for this year and Ofsted has been instructed not to consider them.

The Committee noted that the College was on course for a very strong results profile for 2019-20 and suggested that the hard work of staff and trajectory of the College should be recognised and celebrated internally.

The Committee noted that 33 16-18 students secured new grade 4s in the voluntary November 2019 GCSE English and maths re-sits. In response to a question, it was reported that represented 27% of the students who had requested to undertake the resit in November. The staff had tried to help the students but this was not easy as students undertook the exams of the examination board of the school they had attended, which was not necessarily the same examination board that the College uses. This year the College will try and encourage students to re-sit in November and if they achieve a Grade 4 will refund the cost of the re-sit (which is what happened last November too). With regard this year's awards, Government guidance appears to suggest that if a student enrolled at the College wishes to take English or maths because they are unhappy with the calculated grade from the school, it is the College's responsibility to ensure that they can do that examination. The student will not have to return to the school. However, if a student wishes to take an examination in a subject that the College does not offer, such as Geography, they would return to the school.

8.2. **Apprenticeships**

CIC/CQ/20/2/7, Current performance including in-year progress – Apprenticeships, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality.

It was reported that apprenticeships is the most challenging type of provision in terms of COVID-19 with different factors impacting on their ability to achieve. Around one third of apprentices were currently furloughed (447), with a small number (12), so far, having been made redundant. Over the last two weeks the indications have been that if employers have to lose staff, then apprentices are the first to be made redundant. Students who are furloughed continue to work with the College.

In terms of learners who were going to achieve this year (210 learners), there is uncertainty over how many will be able to. In some cases the College is still waiting for directions from the awarding bodies (expected in the next two weeks) on whether assessments can be adapted. Many learners need assessment in the workplace, and in June a small number of assessors will start some of this work with apprentices that are back in the workplace as part of a risk assessed activity. It is likely that a large number of apprentices will have to continue next year. Many learners may not be in a position to continue because they have lost their job or their employers do not want them to continue because it is not their priority. The situation is being monitored closely, with areas gathering information on a weekly basis. Some sectors the College works with still seem to be strong and talking about apprenticeships next year, but it is uncertain at this stage what the impact will be on learner numbers in the autumn.

Governors noted the frustrations of the management team that a number of awarding bodies had still not issued guidance on the process for the awarding of qualifications this year, or any indication of the timeframe for this. It is believed that awarding bodies are now coming under pressure from Ofqual to provide this information.

8.3. **Adult Learning Programmes**

CIC/CQ/20/2/8, Current year performance – Adult Learners, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality, Teaching and Learning.

It was reported that the College had been making good progress prior to the COVID-19 closure. In ESOL, the results in the speaking and listening examinations were much better than the national averages and the performance in the prior year. It is difficult to predict where the College will end the year in terms of achievement.

Governors asked if the College was able to access any additional resources to help support disadvantaged learners with technology. It was reported that adult learners are mainly in the Learning Shops and it is very difficult to access funds to support them with technology for short programmes. There is no guidance on this. The only guidance is around support for the provision of laptops for 16-18 learners who meet the eligibility criteria for bursaries. The College has been able to support seven requests for laptops for students who meet the criteria.

8.4. **Vulnerable Learners**

CIC/CQ/20/2/9, Current year performance – Vulnerable Learners (Study Programmes), was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Student Services and Support. Unlike previous reports, which focused on predicted outcomes for this group of learners, the report provided Governors with an overview of what the College was doing to support these learners during the current lockdown.

Noting the coverage in the media on domestic abuse during this period, Governors questioned how the College views this in relation to safeguarding students off campus. It was reported that somebody at risk or concern because of domestic violence could take different forms (physical or emotional; family conflict; sibling bully; etc). The College has not noticed a particular spike associated with reports of domestic violence during the period of closure. The College is reaching out to students already identified as vulnerable or where there are concerns. Teaching staff and students have been reminded that they can get additional support from the Welfare Team. A member commented that a report on domestic violence last year found that whilst there had not been an increase in Essex or more widely in terms of the number of calls for help, there had been a significant increase in the violence associated with domestic violence.

Governors asked about the potential impact of the lock down on widening participation and achievement gaps. It will be potentially difficult to measure this this year because of the way grades will be calculated. There are probably a number of students who have been engaging on a limited basis during the lockdown, but there may be more of a longer term problem as the College starts to consider remote learning in a different way for next year. Some students may be able to manage for a period of time, but if a significant proportion of their study going forward requires engagement on line they might be more disadvantaged. There may be a requirement to invest in additional equipment, but the College is only able to support students if they meet the criteria for a bursary.

A member reported that she was due to see research on inequalities and levels of social, educational and digital exclusion caused by the Coronavirus crises. Funds are beginning to become available through a strategic partnership for Colchester to try and bridge the gap that seems to be emerging. Relevant information will be passed on to the College.

The College has started to consider how to support learners with special educational needs and disabilities if it is no longer possible or appropriate for a Learning Support Practitioner to shadow a student in the classroom because of social distancing requirements, and students are accessing more work online. The College will be working with colleagues at Northampton College to see whether they can share any good practice in this area.

9. **Teaching and Learning Survey 2019-20**

CIC/CQ/20/2/10, Teaching and Learning Survey 2019-20, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality, Teaching and Learning.

Governors questioned the low level of engagement in one particular area (12 respondents). This was an apprenticeships group. It was reported that apprenticeships is a difficult area to survey and previously a separate survey has been sent out to apprentices. The process was changed this year. Some learners do not come into college and their experience of teaching and learning is different to that of learners on more traditional day release type courses who do come into college. The apprentices who come into College were included as part of the general teaching and learning survey this year. It was hoped to find out how these learners view the benefits or not of the delivery, but the College did not get the information it wanted. This will be reviewed again for next year. There are a range of surveys for apprenticeships, including one for employers.

With more teaching and learning likely to be on line next year, the 2020-21 survey will want to find out about students' views on that as well as about traditional face to face teaching.

Governors noted a very strong set of survey results overall. When the data is used in the self-assessment the high scores will need to be linked to the focus on CPD and the student experience in the classroom.

Governors noted that staff absence had provoked negative response from students and asked how the College would address this with a move towards more online learning. It was reported that there may be a number of staff who are unable to work from campus in the future, because they are in the vulnerable category or are asked to self-isolate, but who are able to work from home. It is easier to see who is working when they are in College, but over this period the importance of still reporting sick has been impressed upon people, and staff are still reporting sick. Going forward performance is likely to be measured more on results rather than by attendance. The question had been raised earlier that day on whether someone who takes a holiday abroad and has to quarantine on their return would be required to take annual leave to cover the period of the quarantine. This will depend on whether the individual can work from home during this period and can evidence it. It will be more difficult for those staff that need to be in College to do their job, such as technician staff.

It was reported that in HE, course delivery has been delivered in a virtual classroom with groups of students on line. Staff have also been encouraged to use technology to video sessions so that if students have not been able to be present on line at a given time they are not disadvantaged and can still access the learning later. To deal with absences going forward similar plans will need to be in place to ensure all students can access delivery when they are expecting it.

10. **Process for Self-Assessment 2019/20 and Governor Involvement**

The Principal sought the views of Governors on how they would like to be involved in the self-assessment process. The approach to self-assessment this year will be similar to previous years with a focus at curriculum area level and at whole college level on the Ofsted framework around Intent, Implementation and Impact. In a year when Ofsted will not be focussing on the results for 2019-20 the College will need to look at other ways to measure impact (progression and destinations, and the engagements that take place). The self-assessment process will start in late summer and conclude for curriculum areas in early autumn. It was suggested that Governors get involved by meeting and talking to Area Heads about the process and what has impacted them. This could be on a thematic basis (apprenticeships, Study Programmes) or looking at whole areas, with 2-3 Area Heads sharing their thinking. It is hoped that Governors will benefit from being involved earlier and at a more granular level. It will be made clear to staff that this not an extra level of scrutiny but a layer of support to staff and to help Governors with understanding their approach. Governors agreed that this was an excellent idea, as an invitation to be involved, rather than a requirement.

11. **Date of Next Meeting**
Thursday, 2nd July 2020 at 3.00pm.
12. **Any Other Urgent Business**
There were no items.