

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee
held on 11 November 2020

Present

Keith Moule, in the Chair
Alison Andreas
Tyler Burgess
Zainab Domingue

Pam Donnelly
Kevin Prince
Brenda Rich
Terry Smyth

In Attendance

Nils Franke	Dean of Higher Education
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 2nd July 2020 (CIC/CQ/20/4/1) were received and confirmed as an accurate record.

4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

None, other than on the agenda

5. **National Student Survey 2019-20**

CIC/CQ/20/4/3, The 2020 National Student Survey (NSS), was received and presented by the Dean of Higher Education. The survey is for final year undergraduate students in England. Overall student satisfaction in England was slightly down (-1.16%) in 2019-20. This was probably due to the timing of the survey (between January and April 2020) and the overlap with the early weeks of lockdown and move to remote learning.

The Committee's attention was drawn to the headline data for University Centre Colchester:

- The response rate was 65% (108 out of 160 eligible students)
- Overall satisfaction rose from 78% to 79%.
- The results for 'the teaching on my course', 'assessment and feedback', and 'academic support' continue to be above the national average, and are very close to the national average for 'learning opportunities'
- The College continues to perform less well, compared to the national average, in the areas of organisation and management; Learning Resources; and student voice.
- There are considerable variations in how students respond at programme/school level, with very low ratings in the School of Applied Technologies and very high ratings in the School of Music, Media and Performing Arts.

- The low ratings for the Students' Union were not surprising, given there was no functioning Union for UCC last year. The College tried to launch an HE specific Students Union in November 2019, but there was little interest from the student body. Elections for the role of Students' Union President and Vice President are scheduled for the autumn term.

The category 'organisation and management' comprises three questions: (i) IT resources and facilities; (ii) library; and (iii) access to course specific resources. Although the College is currently making a significant investment in the IT infrastructure, this was too late to have a positive impact on the student feedback for 2019-20. It is believed that the College's ratings for library resources (which includes books, on-line services and learning spaces) are down because the students rely very heavily on going to the library and working with physical resources.

The four key recommendations were noted:

- an action plan for the School of Applied Technologies, where the NSS ratings are consistently low. The results may be reflective of the fact that this is a new School, created following a merger at the beginning of year.
- Development of a clear UCC internal communications strategy to better promote UCC and what is going on to the student community.
- Achieving ongoing engagement from the student body on the formation of a UCC specific students' union.
- Develop a medium-term learning resources investment plan.

Governors noted that the NSS is only completed by final year students, and asked if UCC students on the first or second year of their programme are asked the same questions so that comparisons can be made. Governors were particularly interested in whether there was any indication that the response from current students was better in respect of the IT facilities. It was reported that feedback from other year groups is captured through the module framework. Although a "like for like" comparison is not available, the College can see where the main issues are, particularly through the comments. The College should have an overview mid-year when the first year students complete their first survey. The College was aware at the end of last year that wifi was a particular issue (connectivity and speed). It was recognised that HE students in particular were more likely to need ad-hoc wifi connection and HE areas were prioritised when new resources were installed over the summer. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the new system is much improved.

It was reported that a lot of the dissatisfaction was found to be from students who were not being taught in the UCC Centre, for example Construction students located in the West Wing where resources are shared with FE students. If these students could be transferred into a different setting and be considered part of the HE community it would make a difference to their experience.

A Governor noted that 108 students completed the survey. If only a few of these students were from the School of Applied Technologies then the response of one student could make a significant difference in terms of the statistics. It would therefore be useful to know the response rate per student group.

Governors noted the lack of engagement with the Students' Union and asked whether support was available from other organisations, such as the College's degree awarding university or the National Students' Union, to help promote the benefits of Student Union membership. The College does try to promote the benefits of the Union.

Governors questioned whether the students recognised the importance of the NSS to the reputation of the institution and suggested doing more to raise awareness and encourage participation, such as through social media. One of the considerations being looked at for next year is the creation of a UCC social media presence.

Governors questioned whether some assumptions were being made in respect of the survey results and suggested asking students directly for their feedback in areas such as IT and library support to ensure actions are appropriately targeted.

It was noted that there is uncertainty over the future of this national survey, which is currently under review.

The Dean of Higher Education left the meeting

6. **Draft SAR 2019-20**

A special meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee will be held on 30th November 2020 to consider the draft SAR 2019-20.

7. **Compliments and Complaints 2019-20**

CIC/CQ/20/4/2, Comment and Complaints Summary 2019/20, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality, Teaching and Learning. The overall number of complaints received was small, given the size of the College, and significantly down on the previous year. This reduction was potentially due to the reduced attendance as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and the closure of the College campuses in March 2020.

A number of complaints related to student behaviour outside the campus (small group of students congregating in the nearby retail park). The College addressed this by reminding students that they are ambassadors for the organisation. The Assistant Principal outlined the background of a small number of complaints that had been received under the headings of bullying and discrimination.

Governors asked about a small number of complaints related to the behaviour of security staff and were advised that this was to do with the manner of the staff, such as when reminding students they need to wear their lanyards. The new Security Manager organised training in dealing with difficult conversations.

Governors sought assurance that a robust referral process is in place for any complaints that raise concerns in respect of safeguarding. The Assistant Principal confirmed that she has direct oversight of all complaints and would refer concerns as appropriate.

Governors asked for more information on the number of complaints that had been resolved. The Assistant Principal agreed to provide a more detailed analysis of the number of complaints that have been upheld and not upheld in future reports to this Committee. It was reported that the HE complaints procedure is slightly different. HE students who do not feel that their complaint has been satisfactory dealt with can take their complaint to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA). The College receives an annual statement from OIA which could be brought to this Committee. Last year, one complainant took their complaint to the OIA. The OIA agreed with the College's decision not to uphold the complaint. The number of complaints in HE is very low and the College normally manages to resolve them before they get to the formal complaints stage.

8. **Start of Year Update**

8.1. **Education Programmes for Young People**

A positive start to the year was reported. Weekly attendance, which the College would normally expect to be at 93% at this time of the year, was between 90% and 91%. Overall attendance for online lessons was 89%. This compares favourably to what is being reported nationally. Overall attendance in secondary schools in the East was 88% at the end of the last half term.

The first round of predicted grades for the year has just been completed. The profile (93.5%) is similar to previous years. The College could achieve 90% achievement this academic year, if progress was similar to recent years.

A student survey has been undertaken. Students are very positive about their experience in the first half term and about the efforts that the College is making in respect of Covid-Safety, on campus lessons and online lessons. Students would like to spend more of their time in College and the College will bring them back on campus as soon as it is safe to do so. The College continues to run a mixed-model of delivery, with students on campus for the majority of their planned hours in their main subject. This is being monitored very carefully, and student groups are being brought back fully on campus if there are concerns about attendance or participation in online lessons. The number of groups that need to be on campus in order to use specialist equipment is also starting to increase.

8.2. **Apprenticeships**

Apprenticeships is one of the areas of the College's work that is most at risk this year, given the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on employment. Target enrolments were reduced by 30% to 467 in the budget for this year. As at the previous day the College had enrolled 227 learners against the November target of 276, with a further 116 students in the process of being enrolled. The College is also receiving a lot more enquiries about apprenticeships.

Attendance is in line with previous years. Since the lockdown a number of employers do not want students coming into College or people visiting the workplace. As a result, more is being done online or by telephone, including reviews.

The College works with a number of small companies who are struggling as a result of the lockdown. Over the summer period 45 learners lost their job and a number of apprentices have been furloughed and are at risk of redundancy. The College is doing what it can to support learners whose apprenticeship is at risk, including help in finding a new placement.

8.3. **Adult Learning Programmes**

The Learning Shops did not open until the second week in September, and the number of people who can attend each day has been reduced by up to 30% because of social distancing requirements. By the end of October the College had achieved 120 starts, about half the target for the period. There were a further 51 starts during the first week of November. Adult Learning Shop provision has been re-introduced at the Braintree Campus, where the enrolment target for the first month of operation was exceeded. The introduction of remote learning opportunity through the Learning Shops may help improve enrolment numbers.

In addition to the adult provision through the Learning Shops the College enrolls adults on 16-18 Study Programmes as in-fill students (normally between 200 to 300 per year). This year the number of adults in-filling is slightly higher than in previous years.

The decision has been taken not to run most leisure programmes for the foreseeable future, impacting on adult numbers. This will be kept under review and provision may be reinstated later in the year.

Governors asked if the local need had changed as a result of the pandemic. Adult provision and planning for meeting the needs of the local community in respect of rebuilding the economy post Covid-19 and Brexit is going to be the subject of a single agenda item meeting of the Senior Leadership Team. The College is waiting for the Government to publish the list of which courses are going to be fully funded at Level 3 and above, for adults that need to train or re-train in areas of need. A thorough review is also taking place to ensure provision is more cohesive and that adult learners are properly supported.

Governors observed that one of the challenges for adult learners is that they may lack confidence, or perceive other barriers to enrolling on a learning programme, and asked if any thought had been given to providing mentorship. The College does have a National Careers Service contract which provides opportunities for support for adult learners.

Governors asked about College links to those areas of the community that are a cause for concern with regard to redundancies. The College has links through all subject areas into local employers and CI Business Solution, the area responsible for commercial delivery, is in contact with employers in many areas.

8.4. **Vulnerable Learners**

Performance and attendance for all groups is largely in line with the College average. The biggest gap is in attendance amongst high needs learners which is currently at 87% compared to the College average of 90.5%. As there are only 68 learners in this group, the data is likely to be skewed by one or two poorly attending students. Some of these students have health conditions that mean they have been unable to attend sessions on campus since the lockdown and the College is supporting them to learn from home.

In response to a question it was confirmed that the data on vulnerable learners does not include HE students. Support for HE students is dealt with through a separate process in UCC Academic Services. Performance and support needs for different groups of students are monitored and reported on to the Office for Student.

9. **Student Enrolments 2020/21**

The Principal updated the Committee on the current position in respect of student enrolments. The College had enrolled 3909 16-18 FT learners against a funded target of 3692. HE has recruited well with 522 FT students against a target of 493 and 131 PT students against a target of 103. The biggest area of concern is the Adult Education Budget and Full Cost provision which has been impacted by the pandemic.

10. **Quality Improvement 2020-21**

CIC/CQ/20/4/2, Approach to Quality Assurance/Improvement for 2020-21 including process for Teaching and Learning Observation, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality, Teaching and Learning. Governors noted the clear strategic approach to developing teaching and learning. The College will continue to work with Tom Sherrington who has put together a teaching strategy. The approach to observations will be much more developmental, focusing on specific areas of practice. In response to a question it was confirmed that the same development process will be used for all form of delivery: face-to-face teaching, online teaching, online reviews, and for people going into the workplace to do reviews.

11. **Update on Ofsted 2020-21**

The College is due to have an interim monitoring visit before the end of December 2020. This will be a remote, two-day, visit looking at how the College is dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic, how the curriculum has changed as a result of the pandemic, the challenges and how the students are being engaged. The visit will result in a published report, but no judgements will be made, and the findings will not link through to the formal Ofsted inspection. It will be a very structured processes with a very limited opportunity to showcase the College. There will be a series of virtual meetings with senior leaders, middle managers, employers, teachers and some students.

Ofsted intends to restart full observations in January 2021 and it is assumed that Colchester Institute could be inspected any time from January.

12. **OfS Policies**

It was noted that there were no policies to be reviewed this term.

13. **FE Compliments, Comments and Complaints**

CIC/CQ/20/4/5, Feedback Procedures – Concerns, Complaints and Compliments, was received, considered and accepted for recommendation to the Board.

14. **Date of Next Meeting**

There will be a special meeting on Monday, 30th November 2020 at 4.00pm.

15. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items

PART II – CONFIDENTIAL

These minutes are not confidential but the supporting papers are confidential

16. **Safeguarding**

In the absence of the author of the report, it was agreed to defer consideration of the Safeguarding Report (CIC/CQ/20/4/6) until the meeting on 30th November.