

Colchester Institute Corporation

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

Present

Keith Moule, in the Chair
Alison Andreas
Zainab Domingue
Pam Donnelly

Kevin Prince
Brenda Rich
Terry Smyth

In Attendance

Maeve Borges	Vice Principal: Student Services and Support
Nils Franke	Dean of Higher Education
Caroline Fritz	Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement
Hazel Paton	Clerk to the Governors
Jason Peters	Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance
Adam Ward	Assistant Principal: Braintree Campus and STEM
Jill Wognum	Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

Observer

Jenny Thorpe

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Tyler Burgess.

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

None

3. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 11th November 2020 (CIC/CQ/21/1/1) and special meeting held on 30th November 2020 (CIC/CQ/21/1/2) were received and confirmed as an accurate record.

4. **Matters Arising from the Minutes**

None, other than on the agenda

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

5.1. **Education Programmes for Young People**

CIC/CQ/21/1/3, Curriculum Report – Education Programmes for Young People, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance. It was reported that the data suggests that overall achievement rates will be lower than in previous years. Statistically, one explanation might be the absence of the British value qualification.

Governors were advised that the data was being presented with a greater degree of caution than at the same time in the prior year, due to the mode of delivery this year (blended learning during the first term and off campus learning since the start of the spring term). Overall attendance was still at 89.6%, but was starting to fall week on week. The fall in attendance was more pronounced in those courses with a lot of practical work and where the student profile was usually one of low GCSE grades on entry. Staff are working very hard to ensure students remain engaged.

Governors asked about the challenges in respect of how this year's qualifications would be awarded. It was reported that a communication from the Principal had been sent to students and their parents

advising them that the work that they are currently doing would count toward their final qualification and that they must continue to do their best work. This message was being reinforced by teachers in every session. It was reported that Ofqual's consultation was due to end on 29th January and it was likely to be the end of February/early March before the College would know what students will need to do in order to achieve. It was expected that for almost all courses with practical elements students would need to come back to complete all, or 90%, of the activities that they would normally be expected to undertake. If this was the case, it would be problematic if students were not able to return to campus for the summer term. Breaking news earlier that day suggested that schools and colleges were likely to return to campus from 8th March.

Governors asked about progress compared to the same time last year and were advised that overall it was very similar for 16-19 learners.

Governors noted that attendance was currently at 89.6% and questioned whether there was a threshold for attendance below which achievement rates could be adversely affected. It was reported that students normally achieve when attendance is at 80% and above. Staff were working hard to tackle the dip in attendance, which was at 85% in the first week of term, but had increased by 2% each week and was now at 89%. An area of particular concern was ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) where overall attendance that week was 79%.

5.2. Apprenticeships

CIC/CQ/21/1/4, Current performance including in-year progress – Apprenticeships, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality. It was reported that:

- the College was still recruiting reasonably well against the reduced target for the year.
- The current lockdown was likely to impact programmes that were due to start that term
- Currently fewer than 10% of apprentices were furloughed. The College was still working with these learners.
- End Point Assessments had been delayed in some areas; the College was going ahead with those Assessments that were still running. Thirty learners due to their take End Point Assessment in carpentry in February would not get the opportunity to come on site for hands on practice ahead of the assessment which might impact on the results.
- A number of employers are currently preferring their apprentices to work full time in the business rather than study, which is a challenge as the learners need that time to develop wider skills. This may have a negative impact in terms of students completing successfully in the expected timeframe.

In response to questions from the Committee it was reported that:

- The best case achievement rate for apprentices (81%) was based on those in learning with a planned end date of July 2021 or earlier.
- Most apprenticeships are a minimum of 18 months and a high number of electrical and plumbing apprenticeships are considerably longer.
- The impact of the current situation was not being seen yet. In the previous year a lot of learners lost their employment quite late in the year as companies came out of lockdown. This trend could be repeated and learners may lose their employment when the current furlough arrangements end in April.
- The College was monitoring the situation closely and doing what it could to help those learners who lose their jobs to find alternative employment.

Governors were concerned that being made redundant at an early stage of their career could be life changing for students in terms of ambition and aspirations, and asked how the College was supporting these learners, particularly in terms of counselling and mental health services. It was

reported that the CIBS (CI Business Solutions) team try to match students with alternative employment and Area staff also talk to employers about employment opportunities. Depending on the stage the student is at in their programme, it might possible for them to continue without being in employment. It was reported that the College had a significant number of staff who had received training in mental health first aid, and the Welfare Team were available to provide counselling support. A Member recommended the Charlie Waller Trust as a further resource for FE tutors on mental health support.

5.3. **Adult Learning Programmes**

CIC/CQ/21/1/5, Current performance including in-year progress – Adults, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality. It was reported that adult learning was the biggest area of concern. A number of practical adult courses could not be started because of the pandemic, and engagement on some programmes was problematic. Retention was currently good but there was concern that it could worsen as the year progressed.

The Learning Shops, which largely provide programmes for adults referred by Job Centres Plus, were currently closed. Although a lot of online provision was being offered, these learners tend to prefer facilitated learning, or do not have access to equipment for online learning.

It was reported that the College must continue to run examinations for the AAT students because the awarding body does not offer alternative assessment within an alternative time frame. Achievement rates for these programmes were very low last year, and that was likely to be case this year as adult learners chose to defer rather than attend the examinations. Attendance at examinations last year was less than 50%.

Governors were concerned at the long term impact of the current situation on employers and the readiness of Colchester and the local community to recover post-pandemic, and asked how the College was engaging with employers at this time. The Principal confirmed that the College was aware of its key responsibilities and was trying to support employers through CIBS. The College had been contacted by the Lead for Economic Development at Braintree District Council and were due to meet with a small group the following week. The purpose of the meeting was to understand what was most needed by employers in North Essex (Colchester, Tendring, Braintree, Chelmsford and Uttlesford). Some funding would be available to support this that was not constrained by normal funding rules and the College was keen to seek ways to assist

5.4. **Vulnerable Learners**

CIC/CQ/21/1/6, Current year performance – Vulnerable Learners (Study Programmes), was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that for most of the measures and most categories of vulnerable learners, the data was largely in line with the College average. The data for Free School Meals students was less positive and more of a cause for concern. These students' families face the greatest financial hardship, and they are likely to be impacted in a number of ways (such as not having access to quiet work spaces at home, or lack of devices and connectivity to access on line working) which were not necessarily apparent during the period of blended learning earlier in the academic year. The College was doing what it could to support these students and was waiting for another delivery of Chromebooks. Student Support, course tutors and Progress and Destination Tutors continue to provide welfare and other support to students during this period of remote learning. In response to a question the Principal confirmed that, at this stage and with the right support, it would be possible turn around the current predicted achievement in the majority of cases.

Governors asked if the support available to learners was limited to devices and were advised that the government's Get Help with Technology scheme could include things such as 4G routers. The College is waiting for more information on this scheme and how to apply but it is now half way through the year, so the College has supplied many students with equipment from its own budgets already. The College had also received a consignment of sim cards from phone providers and was looking at how

they could be used without creating liability, such as if they were used to access inappropriate material. Devices, which are on loan and will be returned to the College at the end of the academic year or when the student leaves, can be issued within 24 hours of delivery.

The Committee asked for future reports to include data on how these learners compare to target.

6. **Key Updates HE Provision**

CIC/CQ/21/1/7, Key Updates HE Provision, was received and presented by the Dean of Higher Education. The Committee's attention was drawn to:

- Programme development - UCC was looking to identify further programmes at Level 4 and Level 7 within the next six months. In particular the Level 4 HE qualifications could be taken on a bite-size modular basis.
- UCC actions against the Office for Students (OfS) terms of registration.
- An internal review of UCC's online and/or blended academic provision, due to take place in early February. The purpose of review, which follows the receipt of a letter by the OfS to the sector in January 2021, was to give assurance that the provision was meeting students' learning outcomes and was compliant with consumer law. It was reported that OfS had moved its position in respect of in-principle student refunds, and that providers were encouraged to take an individual approach to claims for a refund as a result of the pandemic.

The Dean of Higher Education left the meeting.

7. **Principal's Report**

CIC/CQ/21/1/8, Principal's Report – January 2021, was received and noted.

The Committee asked for an update on preparations for mass coronavirus testing and the challenges. It was reported that processes had been put in place quite quickly and that the College had been offering tests to staff who were working regularly on campus (about 50). Students coming in for the AAT examinations had also been given the opportunity to be tested in advance of their exam. About 90 asymptomatic tests had been processed; none had come back positive.

It was reported that a communication had been sent to staff the previous day offering all staff the opportunity to be tested for their own reassurance, whether they were working on campus or not. This invitation was extended to Governors.

The main concern was the expectation that all staff and students would be tested twice before they return to campus, with up to 1000 tests being carried out a day in the two weeks leading up to the campus reopening. The College had done what it could to prepare, but needs more people coming through to stress-test the arrangements and see how quickly the tests can be processed.

Members asked if there was an expectation that all staff should be tested and were advised that the guidance was very clear that testing was optional and confidential. It was reported that of the people attending campus for examinations that week only 24% had taken up the offer of a test. In contrast HE guidance states that students returning to campus must take two tests or isolate for ten days before returning to campus.

A Member asked about access to learning for students who decide to isolate at home and the period of notice that would be given in respect of being tested before coming on to campus. It was reported that residential students had been provided with a PCR test before they left at Christmas, which could be used and posted off before the student returns to Colchester. All other students could use the testing facilities on campus, with the results available within 30 minutes. There were no plans to change the approach to the delivery of sessions in HE that had been in place since the start of the academic year. For the majority of sessions, students could choose to study on line or in person.

Brenda Rich left the meeting

8. **Supporting Teaching and Learning Improvement**

CIC/CQ/21/1/9, Supporting Teaching and Learning Improvement, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement. It was reported that there had been a considerable change in the focus of observations this year, with staff being supported to develop online teaching skills. It was noted that to date, 140 development plans had been returned to the Quality Office for analysis. In response to a question it was reported that the College would normally carry out about 250 observations each year.

9. **Feedback from Student Survey**

CIC/CQ/21/1/10, Induction Survey 2020 – 21, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement. It was reported that the survey had been specifically focused to get feedback on the student experience with online classes. Scores were mixed, but there were some very positive comments in the written feedback. Students in many areas were grateful for the College's efforts and were satisfied with their online classes. There were also a number of students who found online classes more difficult. The College recognised this and continued to bring students back on campus until the latest lockdown. Governors asked if the results for questions about online learning could be skewed by being answered by students who were not working on line. It was acknowledged that that could be the case.

Members asked how the results compared to prior years and were advised that the scores were very similar for those questions that were broadly the same as those asked previously.

Arising from the discussion it was reported that the Teaching and Learning Development Day on 9th February would focus heavily on online delivery. It was intended that students would be surveyed again, but the timing might be delayed until staff had had an opportunity to implement their new skills.

Governors noted that online learning could be very demanding and asked about the College's overall role in respect of online safety and emotional support. It was reported that at the start of the pandemic comprehensive information on mental health resources was published on the website, which students are signposted to. This would be updated to include information on the Charlie Waller Trust. Teaching staff are very familiar with the referral routes and services and students are aware of how to access support. A communication would be sent to students before half term reminding them that internal services are not available out of term time. Pastoral support processes continue and students have an opportunity to raise any concerns during individual tutorials and 1:1 discussions with their tutors and Progress and Destination Tutors.

Pam Donnelly left the meeting.

10. **Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan**

CIC/CQ/21/1/11, Update on the Quality Improvement Plan, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that when the Improvement Plan was developed as part of the self-assessment process, it was thought that the blended approach to learning would continue. The current period of significant disruption had not been expected. As a result some actions may need to be delayed or replaced with more relevant and urgent actions.

The Committee asked for future reports to include more information, such as timelines, to help Members monitor and evaluate progress.

11. **Quality Framework Strategy**

CIC/CQ/21/1/12, Quality Improvement Strategy, was received and presented by the Assistant Principal: Quality and Teaching and Learning Improvement. The document, which had first been published in November 2019, and been updated to reflect the current developmental observation process, changes to job titles, current targets and learner voice processes. The Assistant Principal reported that she was currently working with the Student Services Team to further update the Learner Journey page to make it clear that careers and advice events are not just one off events but underpin other activities during the year.

The Committee APPROVED the Quality Framework Strategy, and agreed that it should be subject to an annual review.

12. **Safeguarding Policy**

The Committee received, considered and APPROVED CIC/CQ/21/1/3, Safeguarding Policy. The Policy had been updated to reflect changes to statutory duties and best practice. A member asked how the College ensures that all staff had received and read the guidance Keeping Children Safe in Education and suggested that they are asked to complete and pass a short quiz on Moodle. The Vice Principal: Student Services and Support reported that this was not something that had been raised as a concern during audits, but she would consider this further. One option could be including this as part of the annual self-declaration that all staff are required to make in respect of criminal convictions and pending criminal prosecutions.

13. **Annual Report to the Board**

CIC/CQ/21/1/14, Curriculum and Quality Committee Annual Report to the Board 2019-20, was received, considered and approved for submission to the Board.

14. **Review of Meeting**

It was agreed to bring the following matters to the attention of Members at the next Corporation Board meeting:

- Current performance
- How teaching and learning is being supported during this period of online learning
- The Covid-19 mass testing programme
- The key OfS measures

Observations in respect of making meetings more effective included:

- Members raising points of clarification/operational questions with the relevant officer in advance of the meeting. The staff member presenting the agenda item could make the decision on whether points raised in advance need further discussion at the meeting.
- Shorter, more concise papers

15. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday, 24th March 2021 at 4.30pm

16. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items