

Colchester Institute Corporation

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Board
held on Wednesday, 27 April 2022
at the Sheepen Road Campus**

Present:

Kevin Prince, *in the Chair*
Alison Andreas
Stephanie Bettinson
Richard Block
Peter Cook

Liz Goodall
Irene Kettle
Aron Leader
Richard Wainwright

In Attendance:

Gary Horne Deputy Chief Executive
Hazel Paton Clerk to the Governors
Jill Wognum Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

The meeting was preceded with a tour of the Centre for Health and Social Care Professions

PART I

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Lisa Blake, Olive Campbell-Lilo, Mark Davies, Patrick Giddings and Terry Smyth.

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

None.

3. **Agreement to Starred Agenda Items**

Governors were invited to indicate any items which they wished to star for discussion or question. No additional items were starred. Items that had not been starred were noted and/or approved without discussion.

4. **Minutes**

4.1. The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 February 2022 (CIC/22/2/1) were received and approved as an accurate record. The Chair signed the minute book.

4.2. The Board received CIC/22/2/2, Written Resolution, and noted that on the recommendation of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee the Corporation Board APPROVED by written resolution:

- (i) The appointment of Stephanie Bettinson as an Independent Member and Member of the Finance and Resources Committee for a four year term of office with effect from 1 April 2022.
- (ii) The appointment of Richard Block as an Independent Member and Member of the Finance and Resources Committee for a four year term of office with effect from 1 April 2022.

Stephanie and Richard were welcomed to their first meeting of the Board.

5. **Matters arising from the minutes**
There were no matters arising from the minutes.

6. **Chair's Action/Announcements**

6.1. Governors who had yet to arrange a link visit were asked to give this priority.

6.2. It was reported that the Deputy Chief Executive and Chairs of the Audit and Risk and Finance and Resources Committees would be meeting Barclays Bank's Head of Education the following day. The purpose of the meeting was to follow up on the request for a reduction in the interest rate on the loan.

7. **Principal's Report**

CIC/22/2/3 Principal's Report – April 2022, was received and noted.

The Principal updated the Board on a meeting with three senior officers from the DfE, who had visited the College the previous week. The Principal and Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance had shared their concerns about the current proposals for the defunding of Level 3 qualifications which could result in the College having c1300 fewer students. The concern is that where there is not a T Level, the alternative qualifications will not be the large applied general qualifications, which are equivalent to three A Levels, but the smaller qualifications (equivalent to one A Level) which sit alongside A Levels. It was apparent from the discussion that the Officers did not understand the impact of the proposals on colleges that do not offer A Levels or that students who choose to do large applied general qualifications because they do not want to do A Levels may be forced back down a path that includes A Levels. The announcement of the first list of programmes to be defunded was awaited.

It was reported that on 29 April, officers from Colchester Institute and Colchester Sixth Form College would be meeting with Colchester MP Will Quince to discuss support for mental health. The Principal would take the opportunity to raise with him the key concerns around the defunding of qualifications and the risks around industrial placements.

Noting that the 97% tolerance on the Adult Education Budget allocation would not be achieved, Governors asked if there would be a financial clawback, and if so whether this had been built into the Monthly Management Report and Accounts. It was confirmed that this had been accounted for in the Income and Expenditure account and the cashflow.

Governors questioned the Executive on the planned College Careers events to attract new staff. It was reported that this was one small part of a range of things that the College was doing to recruit staff. The College had had some success in the last few weeks recruiting into brickwork, groundworks and plumbing, but it was difficult to know which activities (LinkedIn, managed campaigns, careers events) were having the greatest impact. The first College Careers event the previous evening, which had been advertised in the local press, attracted two serious candidates to teach business. The next steps would be for them to come in and meet with the Head of Area. Another event was scheduled for 18 May. Governors asked about the timeframe to become qualified to teach and were advised that it was a maximum period of three years. Staff new to teaching complete a 12-week Level 3 initial training programme which covers basic classrooms skills followed by a two year part time PGCE (Post Graduate Certificate in Education).

8. 2022-23 Applications and Curriculum Plan

8.1. Further Education

The Principal updated the Board on 2022-23 applications and curriculum plan for 16-18 learners. As previously reported to the Board an exceptionally high number of applications had been received for September 2022. In common with a number of FE colleges recruitment in September 2021 had been disappointing, with 200 fewer students than expected, enrolling at the College. This was largely due to a second year of Teacher Assessed Grades, which resulted in higher qualifications being awarded to students last summer. Students who might traditionally have come to Colchester Institute also qualified to join A Level programmes and chose to do so. Based on the number of applications and historical conversion rate data, the College was confident that it would regain the 200 students it underrecruited last year plus up to another 200 additional students.

It was reported that:

- There was a big increase in numbers in Construction, Brick, and Electrical. Staffing remained an area of concern in these subjects, in particular Electrical and could be a limiting factor.
- There was a surprising level of growth in applications for Music and Performing Arts at Level 3. These students probably also had applications to do A Levels elsewhere and were less likely to come to Colchester Institute.
- Numbers in Hospitality, which has been in decline over the last ten years, were recovering. There was also a surprising increase in number in Public Services.
- It was likely that the College would bring back Level 1 in Health and Social Care. In previous years teaching staff had been a limiting factor.
- Numbers in media were strong, particularly at the Braintree campus.
- Because of low numbers the decision had been taken not to run Computing (again) at the Braintree campus.
- After a year of no intake, the College was trying to start an Early Years course at the Braintree campus in September.
- For a second year there was a risk that due to low numbers the College would not recruit to Level 2 Performing Arts.

Governors asked if there were any surprises in the applications which would change the strategic thinking from the Board planning day. It was reported that the growth in Music and Performing Arts will not require additional space. Group sizes will move from being just viable (mid-teens) to more positive (low 20s) and will make that subject area more vibrant.

Governors were pleased to hear that numbers in Public Services had increased and asked if there were opportunities to develop relationships with the Police and Fire Service. It was reported that the College already has good relations with uniformed services such as the Police, British Army and the Border Force and was the preferred provider of apprentices to Essex Fire and Rescue. It also has good relations with the Police in terms of student welfare and safeguarding, and community safety.

Governors challenged the Executive on how it would staff a large increase in student numbers. It was reported that there was a staff plan associated with the curriculum plan. There were some areas where the College was prepared to start recruiting now to ensure staff were in place for September, and others where it could start the new academic year with existing staff and recruit very quickly. This year the decision was taken to prioritise 16-18 rather than full cost provision when tutor resources was a limiting factor in Electrical. As part of the curriculum planning activities, it was hoped to recruit more Electrical tutors.

8.2. Apprenticeships

The Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality updated the Board on 2022-23 applications and curriculum plan for Apprenticeships. It was reported that over the last two years the number of new starts had steadily grown. There were no plans to increase on the current year's

numbers and the curriculum plan 2022-23 was for c.600 new starts. Numbers had recovered post Covid and the apprenticeship market was stable. There was potential for further growth in professional programmes, such as Procurement, HR, Management and Fire Fighting (where the College partners with Essex Fire and Rescue), and the Executive was currently working on how this could be resourced. Another challenge with professional programmes is that students have to achieve the professional qualifications before they can do their End Point Assessment (EPA). It was reported that many students and employers get to the point of the professional qualification but do not need to complete the apprenticeship or undergo the EPA once they have the professional qualification. As a result the College loses the achievement rate and the achievement payment. This is a nationally recognised problem and it has been promised that Standards will be redesigned so that professional qualifications become part of the End Point Assessment.

It was reported that:

- In areas where the College is short of resources, and in order to use those resources more effectively, staff in the subject areas are being used in the development of coaches from the workplace.
- One of the areas where there were large numbers, but where it was likely that the College would not be able to take additional student groups in September because of the difficulties in recruiting staff, was Electrical.
- Some higher level progression courses were being introduced, including two Level 7 programmes in HR Management.
- Early Years, where apprenticeships had always been buoyant, was slowly recovering from the pandemic. Numbers for 2022-23 were slightly down on previous years.
- There was a reduction in hairdressing apprenticeships. There is strong competition locally and numbers are not expected to grow. The links to employers are beneficial and the College will retain a small number of apprentices.
- The current model for the Police programme was under review in consultation with representatives from the Police.

A Member asked if the College was working with local employers to help recruit to hard to fill roles. It was reported that the College was doing everything it could to attract someone from the Groundworks industry. The Principal had personally written to all the employers to apologise for the impact of the staffing difficulties and asking if they had someone who could help. Interviews were being held on 29 April which it was hoped would result in one appointment being made, but more staff were needed otherwise students may have to be turned away. Governors suggested asking umbrella organisations or trade associations for the East of England or nationally to help.

Given the reduction in numbers in hairdressing a Member questioned the investment in a new salon. It was reported that Hair and Beauty was a reliable recruitment area. The new salon was part of a relocation rather than an expansion of facilities. The hair salon, which was overdue for an upgrade, was being moved to the ground floor of the CH&FS Building to enable the T Level in Early Years facilities to be established in D Block.

8.3. Higher Education

It was reported that the Curriculum and Quality Committee had discussed the HE Strategy – Towards 2026 and Operational Plan April 2022, at its meeting on 21 April. The operational plan will be going ahead. In terms of the strategy, there were areas where the Committee asked for more detail, and there will be further discussion at the next meeting.

9. Reports from Committee

9.1. Audit and Risk Committee

CIC/22/2/4, Report from the Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee, was received and noted.

9.2. Curriculum and Quality Committee

The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality gave an oral report on the meeting held on 21 April 2022. It was reported that:

- Attendance, retention and progress were all very positive. Committee Members from the FE sector were particularly surprised at the high attendance.
- Although there has been some improvement, achievement levels in the Learning Shops were still an area of concern. The challenge is that these students are hard to reach.
- Adult achievement rates remain static.
- It is anticipated that apprenticeship achievement, which was above the national average last year, will be strong again this year.
- Some employers are happy for students to leave an apprenticeship once they have gained a professional qualification, but before they have achieved the apprenticeship standard. This is particularly the case for students aged 24+.
- The pass rate in the January BTEC exams, which were sat by 1025 students, was 97%. The Committee was disappointed that 13% of students were absent, but noted that a number of absences were due to Covid and there will be opportunities for students to resit the exams.
- There is a huge increase this year in the number of students who need additional support in their exams (such as extra time).
- There has been a slight increase in overall scores for all three aspects (Knowledge, Skills, Behaviour) in the most recent round of progress checks.
- The roll out of 500 new PCs (mainly in B Block) had made a significant difference in improving the student experience.
- The College received confirmation in April that its application to remain on the Register of Apprenticeship Training Providers had been successful.
- The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Annual Report had been considered, and referred back for further work. There had been some discussion on who the report was written for, and whether there should be two reports: one for external use and one for internal use.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the College was fully ready for an Ofsted Inspection. At the current time, teams were being reminded of the key points, and students were being reminded of wider topics which were covered extensively at the beginning of the academic year, such as safeguarding, extremism, and British Values. For the younger students this was being delivered through the tutorial programme. For those provision types which do not have tutorials within their delivery regular newsletters were being sent out. The Executive were asked if they were confident that tutorials were being consistently delivered. It was reported that for the first two terms the learning plans for group tutorials were quite prescriptive. For the final term tutorial, group leaders had much more autonomy over what to choose from central resources. The Teaching and Learning Improvement Manager was in the process of contacting all tutorial group leaders to check on their plans for the summer term and offer support.

9.2.1. Curriculum and Quality Update Report

CIC/22/2/6, Curriculum and Quality Update Report, was received and noted. The Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality reported that all the key measure were positive and the College was doing everything it could to support students. Examinations remained the biggest area of concern. There were quite a high number of examined units on programmes, and a high number of students were doing GCSEs. It was reported that students were very stressed and may not turn up for the exam.

9.2.2. Progress against Quality Improvement Plan

CIC/22/2/7, Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan, was received and noted. Governors questioned the Executive on the difficulties in sourcing industry placements to meet CDF requirements, and in particular the financial implications if it is not able to place people in industry. It was reported that there was a dedicated team of three people working with

Curriculum Leaders to put students in placements. This funding is subject to monitoring reports. The monitoring reports have been received positively by the DfE and the College is on track to reach their expectations.

9.2.3. Update on Strategic Plan Goal

CIC/22/2/9, Update on Strategic Plan Goals, was received and noted.

9.3. Finance and Resources Committee

The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee presented his written report (CIC/22/2/10). The Board's attention was drawn to the following points:

- Staff recruitment – there was a real risk that the College would not be able to staff some subject areas in September 2022.
- Pension review – at the last Board planning day Members asked about alternative pension provision as a possible way to attract new staff. A paper presented to the Committee suggested that there are no alternative options to the current schemes, but a decision was deferred.
- T Levels – the financial impact of the defunding of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications, which could result in over 1000 fewer students from 2024, will be a standing agenda item for this Committee.
- Pre-budget forecast 2022-23 – the Committee had received pre-budget forecasts for two scenarios. The Committee had questioned the Deputy Chief Executive on what appeared to be relatively low levels of assumed inflation (5%) but were reassured that some of the costs were already fixed. The energy fixed contract was due to expire in October.

A Member asked how the surplus for the two pre-budget forecasts compared with the previous year, and whether they were within the normal range. It was reported that the budget surplus for the previous two years, which included contingencies for Covid 19 (for example extra agency costs), was £130k. However, the DfE are reviewing the way financial health is measured. Shadow calculations for the new methodology, included in the March Management Report and Accounts, show that the College will need to get close to a surplus £0.5m in future to remain in Good financial health. The new calculation could potentially be introduced in 2023, but more likely the following year.

A Member asked if, in order to retain and attract staff, the Board should be increasing salaries, and setting breakeven budgets of around £150k until salaries are at an appropriate level. The Principal reported that it was important to invest as much as possible in staff salaries. Over the last few weeks the College had had to increase a very large number of staff salaries following changes to the national living wage. The Principal added that many students were in financial difficulties and many staff, particularly at the lower pay scale levels, would be if the College was not able to raise salaries. Governors agreed putting additional money into staff pay was the right thing to do unless there were other implications. It was reported that the College needs to deliver higher levels of operating surplus to generate cash reserves to support future capital re-development of the Colchester campus. Increasingly, the Department for Education require 50% match funding for capital bids for new buildings. The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the College was more efficient and effective in what it does. Last year, course contributions from all FE work reached 47%. Restructuring in certain areas should lead to a level of improvement in the contribution from HE work. Efficiency improvements in back office support areas will be taken forward once Microsoft 365 and agile working policies are in place.

9.3.1. Management Report and Accounts

CIC/22/2/11, Management Report and Accounts February 2022 [Period 7], was received and noted. The Deputy Chief Executive drew the Board's attention to the headline data in the March 2022 [Period 8] Report, which had been circulated to Governors earlier that week. It was reported that Work Based Learning income remained an area of concern. The Executive continue to monitor this budget line and was doing what it could to improve the position.

A Member asked if the income from the land sale, held in a restricted account as security for the loan, had been returned and was advised that it was still held by the Bank at this stage. The method by which the cash would be released as the loan balance reduced had been pre-agreed. The final payment had been made in February and Governors were concerned that the College was still waiting for the cash in the restricted account to be returned. It was agreed to raise this with the Bank at the meeting on 28 April.

9.3.2. UCC Fee Policy

CIC/22/2/12, UCC Fee Policy 2022-23, was received, considered and APPROVED.

9.3.3. Update on Strategic Plan Goals

CIC/22/2/13, Update on Strategic Plan Goals (goals 6, 7, 9, 10), was received and noted.

9.3.4. Property Matters

The Deputy Chief Executive updated the Board on property matters. It was reported that work was underway on Block D and the Salix project would be completed during the summer, dependent on additional instructions. The College had spent £4m of the £5.1m allocated for the project.

Peter Cook left the meeting

9.4. Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee

The Chair of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee presented his written report (CIC/22/2/14). It was reported that:

- an external review of governance would be commissioned once the position becomes clear on what is required.
- In order to reduce the number of papers coming to the Board, the minutes of Committee meetings will no longer be included on the agenda, but will be published on the Portal. Committee Chairs will continue to report to the Board, and their written reports will include the actions arising from the meetings.

10. Review of Meeting

Governors welcomed the return to meeting in person but felt that it had impacted on attendance. The scope for hybrid meetings was discussed. It was reported of the Deputy Chief Executive was looking at a capital bid to put in video conferencing facilities.

11. Next Meeting

Wednesday, 27 July 2022 at 4.30pm via Zoom. The meeting will be preceded with a Board briefing at 4.00pm.

The Chair reported that the timing of the Board planning meeting just before the extended Bank Holiday weekend was not ideal. It had therefore been agreed to move the meeting to 20 June.

12. Any Other Urgent Business

There were no items.