

## Colchester Institute Corporation

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Board  
held on 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2023  
at the Colchester Campus**

**Present:**

Kevin Prince, *in the Chair*  
Alison Andreas  
Richard Block  
Peter Cook  
Debbie Davis

Brenda Rich  
Terry Smyth  
Dawn Swainson  
Richard Wainwright  
Caroline Williams

**In Attendance:**

Maeve Borges  
Gary Horne  
Hazel Paton  
Jason Peters  
Jill Wognum

Vice Principal: Student Services and Support  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Clerk to the Governors  
Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance  
Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

The Board briefing on the defunding of level 3 qualifications for deferred to a future meeting. The key points of this Government policy were picked up under item 9, Risk Management.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Stephanie Bettinson, Lisa Blake, Mark Davies and Irene Kettle.

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. Items that had not been starred were noted and/or approved without discussion.

4. **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2022 (CIC/23/2/1) were received and approved as an accurate record. The Chair signed the minute book.

5. **Matters arising from the minutes**

CIC/23/2/2, Corporation Board Action Sheet, was received and noted.

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

The Corporation Chair reported that:

- there was a vacancy for an Independent Member on the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee. Governors interested in joining the Committee were asked to contact the Chair outside the meeting.
- he had recently attended the annual dinner for staff award winners 2022. The winners of the annual staff awards were selected by a panel of three Governors. Independent Governors interested in being a member of the selection panel for the staff annual awards 2023 were asked to contact the Chair outside the meeting.
- the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee had been disappointed at the low response rate to the Governor Self-Assessment 2022, which was possibly due to the timing of survey. The

feedback from the self-assessment is important in confirming Governors understanding of what is working well and areas for improvement. The Clerk had been asked re-issue the self-assessment to those Governors who had not responded to the initial circulation.

Peter Cook's interest in joining the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committees and being a member of the staff annual awards selection plan was noted.

**7. Accountability Statement for 2023 to 2024**

CIC/23/2/3, draft Accountability Statement 2023 to 2024, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that the statement, which is a new requirement of the DfE (Department for Education), does not need to be submitted until 31 May 2023. The draft statement was incomplete, because it needed to be cross referenced to and address the priorities in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (LSIP) for Essex, which was under development. The Essex Chambers of Commerce was leading the development of the LSIP, and was required to issue their priorities by the end of March, and the complete LSIP by the end of May. The plan was for Essex colleges to work collaboratively as a group on the LSIP priorities.

A Member suggested that the statement should take into account the new Centre for Coastal Communities which was to be established in Clacton by the University of Essex with money from the Government's Levelling Up Fund. The Principal responded that she would be meeting with the Professor leading on the project for the University the following day.

Governors asked if there was any early information on what would be in the LSIP. It was reported that the first feedback would be in mid-March. All Essex Principals would be present, and it would provide an early opportunity to discuss how the priorities would be covered.

The data on qualification levels across the three districts which the College serves, and what it meant in terms of the potential market for Colchester Institute, was discussed.

Governors' attention was drawn to the section 'contribution to national, regional, local priorities'. It was reported that the first five target aims and objectives had been taken from the Strategic Plan. Three further targets had been included in respect of development of T Levels, a green skills training centre, and the new health and diagnostics project work, and there might be other targets that the College would wish to include for 2023/24. In response to a question, it was reported that the Renewables Centre was still just an idea. Essex County Council had agreed to provide £50k pump priming revenue funding to support a tutor for the first year and a bid for capital funding costs of £150k has also been submitted. If the project is to proceed a proposal will be taken to the Finance and Resources Committee for final approval.

Governors commented that the statement was clear and straightforward to read, and that it was useful to have all the information in one document. An updated version would be brought to the April Board meeting.

**8. Strategic Plan One Year Action Plan 2023**

CIC/23/2/5, Strategic Plan – One Year Action Plan 2023, was received and presented by the Principal. The proposal, in response to feedback at the last Board meeting, to prioritise four goals (Curriculum, Employers, HR and Braintree) for Board attention and a more detailed update as a main agenda item at the remaining meetings in 2023 was welcomed. Governors questioned the thinking behind the prioritisation of these four goals, given that financial performance was the top risk on the Corporate Risk Register. The explanation that the Finance and Resources Committee spend considerable time scrutinising the College's financial position, and that an update on finance is provided to the Board as a standing agenda item, was accepted. The proposed process for a 'deep dive' into four specific Goals at future meetings was APPROVED.

Governors observed that some of the one year success indicators were vague and open to interpretation and that it would be helpful to include some measures. The example given was the Goal 2 success measure “the teaching and learning experience enables a high proportion of learners to achieve in 2023”. Governors questioned if high proportion meant over 51%, or 87% which would bring it in line with the Goal 1 one year success indicator “in all cases to achieve annual ‘academic targets’ as confirmed with governors”. **Action:** the Principal.

## 9. Risk Management

CIC/23/2/5, Strategic Risks Corporate Risks Register, was received and considered.

### 9.1. Key Risk: Level 3 Applied General Qualifications Defunding from September 2025

The Principal updated the Committee on the strategic risk associated with the defunding of Level 3 Applied General Qualifications from September 2025. It was reported that from 2025/26 the options available to 16-18 year old students would be to study A Levels (which may include doing two A Levels and one additional small, single BTEC qualification); study towards a T Level qualification; or study towards an apprenticeship. Other qualifications were being defunded because the DfE want T Levels to be a success. Many colleges were nervous about offering T Levels for a number of reasons including:

- The requirement to offer 45 days of relevant industry placement. Colleges will not offer places to students if they cannot guarantee a work placement, which has to be completed to achieve the T Level. Also, a lot of students cannot afford to work 45 days unpaid.
- The academic content, which is very demanding. Colleges who piloted T Levels found that students with GCSE grades below 5/6 struggled with the qualification. The vast majority of students currently studying Level 3 technical or applied general qualifications do not have that grade profile and would not cope with that level of study.
- Students studying technical qualifications in areas such as construction trades, catering, and salon, who join at Levels 1 and 2 will not be able progress at the end of Level 2 because a T Level would be too demanding academically. An apprenticeship might provide an alternative route, but there were concerns about the availability of employers who want to take on Level 3 students. The impact of the changes on student numbers would be significant.

In response to questions, it was reported that the qualifications are regulated by the Institute of Apprenticeships and Technical Education. There had been a relaxation of some of the requirements, for example the need to have maths and English at Grade 4, and around the industrial placement, but there was still the issue of how to source the number of placements that would be required.

Governors asked about the likely impact of the changes on Colchester Institute and were advised that early modelling indicated that there would be between 1000 and 1500 fewer enrolments, at c£5k per head funding. Fewer than 30% of learners would successfully access a T Level. There was also the issue of what the College would be able to offer, because of the difficulty of sourcing specialist staff or because of the industrial placement requirements.

The Principal reported that she had written to Robert Halfon MP about the impact of the reforms, and would be attending a Day of Action at Westminster and meeting with Will Quince MP and Sir Bernard Jenkins MP in March. Noting that there would be a general election in 2024, Governors asked what position the Labour Party was on the reforms. It was reported that the AoC believe that the position of the Labour Party will be that T Levels must go forward, but not as an exclusive route. The Government’s own impact assessment states that the changes will impact students from disadvantaged backgrounds. The College is assuming that there will not be a change of Government and is planning for the launch of T Levels. A Member suggested lobbying the Labour Party and it was agreed that the Principal would forward a copy of her letter to Robert Halfon MP to the Labour Education team. **Action:** Principal.

Arising from the discussion, it was noted that there was no reward for the work placement, such as UCAS points. Students have to complete the work placement to achieve the T Level, but there was no incentive to do well. There were also increased risks in terms of safeguarding.

Governors questioned the position of this risk on the Risk Register and were advised that it had already been re-scored and moved to the top of the Risk Register.

#### 9.2. **Key Risk: Significant worsening of financial performance**

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that the College's energy contract had expired in October 2022. The College was able to achieve a flexible tariff on its gas and electricity, but 50% of the cost was 'Non Energy Charges' fixed at that point, so there was little the College could do to influence expenditure over the course of this year. Market rates had come down since the start of the year and were expected to continue to drop, so the position should be better next year. The current investment in new photovoltaic panels at the Colchester and Braintree campuses would make the College less reliant on the external supply. The College was doing what it could to reduce consumption, and was monitoring how much energy each block was using.

It was reported that income was c£1.2m behind budget. Efficiency savings were being made on both staff costs and non-pay lines. New starts were being deferred where possible and a management restructure was underway. The capital approval process had been curtailed and expenditure deferred until next summer. New income opportunities were reported, including sector based work academies, Multiply scheme, and Shared Prosperity Fund.

#### 9.3. **Board oversight of Risk Management**

As part of the Board oversight of Risk Management Governors were asked once per annum to compile a list of key risk for consideration at the forthcoming meeting of the Risk Management Committee. **Action:** Governors were asked to submit their list of key risk to Clerk. A template was included in the meeting pack (CIC/23/2/6).

#### 10. **Safeguarding**

The Vice Principal: Student Services and Support updated the Board on Safeguarding matters. It was reported that:

- mental health and emotional wellbeing continued to be the largest theme within Safeguarding and Welfare.
- A new service for young people under the age of 25 was now available through CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services). Different levels of support were available, such as support with confidence and getting back into education and students were now able to self-refer. The service had been commissioned by the Integrated Care Board Commission Service for five years.
- A meeting to discuss funding opportunities and longer term support for the College's mental health service had been held at the end of February. It was hoped that in addition to the professional consultation the welfare and support team have access to, a senior CAMHS Practitioner would visit every half term to offer them advice.
- The opportunity for CAMHS staff to meet with students on campus was being considered.
- A number of students had expressed their support for, and encouraged the views of, the high profile social media influencer Andrew Tate. This was an emerging theme and a national issue. The College was doing what it could to deal with this.

In response to questions, it was reported that despite the financial pressures the Safeguarding and Welfare Team had benefited from increases resources over the last two to three years, but the support available was never sufficient. The externally staffed WARMS (Wellbeing and Resilience Mental Health Service) Team did not provide the level of support that the College had hoped for and was not the best use of resources. It was hoped that some external funding would be available to allow the College to employ an additional counsellor to work with the visiting team. It might be necessary to redefine the services and support offered by the College due to the ability and capacity of the Welfare Team. For

example, staff who were not sufficiently qualified were working with students on suicidal support plans because the College never turns anybody away and the waiting times following a referral to CAMHS is six to nine months.

## 11. Reports from Committee

### 11.1. Curriculum and Quality Committee

The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee presented his written report (CIC/23/2/7). The Board's attention was drawn to main points of discussion at the Committee meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023, including student attendance, particularly the lower levels of attendance within English and maths. The Committee had wanted to drill down into the data to see if there were any trends or differentials by Level of study, which it was not able to do at the meeting, and had asked for more detailed information at the next meeting. The reasons for the poor attendance at GCSE English and maths were discussed, and a Member suggested getting employers to come in to impress upon students the importance of these subjects. It was reported that the College has a very high number of student doing GCSEs, and a very high proportion in construction trades, a sector where there is a feeling that students do not need English for some of the trades that they will be going into. The Link Governor for maths and English outlined the challenges for the staff. These included class lengths of 90 minutes which, from the student's perspective, is a long time to be doing a subject which they do not enjoy, and ongoing issues associated with Teacher Assessed Grades. A staff Governor reported that a lot of students were anxious about going into groups where they were separated from their friends and suggested this could be reviewed. **Action:** the Link Governor for English and math agreed to follow this up at his next link visit.

The Board received and noted:

- CIC/23/2/8, Curriculum and Quality Update Report
- CIC/23/2/9, Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan
- CIC/23/2/10, Curriculum and Quality Committee Annual Report to the Board 2022-22.

### 11.2. Finance and Resources Committee

It was noted that the Committee had not met since December. The meeting scheduled for 8<sup>th</sup> February had been moved to the end of March.

CIC/23/2/11, Management Report and Accounts December 2022 [Period 5], was received and noted. The Deputy Chief Executive gave an oral report of the January 2023 Management Report and Accounts, which had been published earlier that day. It was reported that income in January was £2.6m compared to the budgeted figure of £2.1m, largely due to 'other income' streams. There was still concern about the ability to maintain costs within budget due to the uncertainty over energy prices and higher staff costs as a result of the increase in the National Minimum Wage. The Executive continue to monitor opportunities for in year recruitment on full cost adult and work based learning provision. Some savings against budget were starting to come through as budget holders tend to spend the majority of their non pay budget at the start of the year.

Governors noted that the full year forecast had deteriorated in successive months from a projected profit of £97k in the September Management Report to the current deficit position and asked if the forecast outturn was likely to deteriorate further. It was reported that full cost income was below budget. A further 200 apprentices needed to be enrolled to achieve the full year target. The College was working with sub-contractors to deliver the AEB budget but there was some risk that the target may not be achieved. Governors noted that the cash flow position had deteriorated but remained stable.

Governors questioned if the budget had been based on the right assumptions. It was reported that the HE budget had been reduced by £500k this year, but income was down by nearly £1m. This was

not unique to Colchester Institute. A poll of FE Colleges in the East of England confirmed that they were all struggling to achieve their HE targets. It was reported that other Higher Education Institutions had flagged financial concerns due to Brexit and the impact of Covid. Similarly, full cost student numbers had still not returned to pre-pandemic levels and adult learners were not at the level they were previously. The College continues to look at new programme areas such as renewables, and new development opportunities to keep the curriculum fresh and marketable for new business.

### 11.3. **Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee**

The Chair of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee presented his written report (CIC/23/2/12). The Board's attention was drawn to the following points:

- FE Associates had been appointed to support the search for the new Chair of Governors
- In addition to the Chair, two further Governors would be leaving the Board at the end of this year. Governors were encouraged to use their networks to search for individuals interested in joining the Board. The Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee were particularly interested in expressions of interest from people with experience in leadership, HR, IT and Finance.

On the recommendation of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee the Board APPROVED the reappointment of Lisa Blake as an Independent Member for a four-year term of office with effect from 1 May 2023.

CIC/23/2/13, Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee Annual Report to the Board 2021-22, was received and noted.

### 12. **Review of Effectiveness of Meeting**

There were no matters arising from the discussion on the effectiveness of the meeting.

### 13. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> April 2023 at 10.00am at the Colchester campus. The meeting will be preceded with a Board briefing at 9.30am and followed by lunch.

### 14. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.