

Colchester Institute Corporation

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Board
held on 26th April 2023
at the Colchester Campus**

Present:

Kevin Prince, *in the Chair*
Alison Andreas
Stephanie Bettinson
Lisa Blake
Richard Block
Peter Cook
Debbie Davis

Irene Kettle
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

Board Briefing – Annual Strategic Conversation

It was reported that the Annual Strategic Conversation (ASC) had taken place the previous day. Two members of the DfE (Department for Education) and a representative of the FE Commissioners Office, had met with the Corporation Chair, Principal, Deputy Chief Executive, and Vice Principal: Curriculum Delivery and Performance, to discuss the strengths, challenges, opportunities and strategic direction of the College. The Principal took Governors through the College's presentation to the meeting, which had been built around the agenda for the meeting. The presentation covered:

- Overview of DfE Skills Reforms
- Impact of Skills Reforms – Opportunities and Challenges
- Progress since the last ASC in December 2021 – Strengths, Challenges and Opportunities
- New (or additional) strengths, Challenges and Opportunities – April 2023
- Partnerships, Collaborations, Stakeholder Relationships
- College Improvement and Priorities
- Five key take-home messages for DfE

It was reported that it was a robust conversation, at the end of which the Executive made clear the significant challenges for the sector, and therefore the College, and that the support of the DfE would be valued and needed.

The DfE had circulate its own presentation to provide context for the DfE Skills Reforms and had asked the College for its comments around the opportunities and challenges presented by the forms.

During the conversation, the College had:

- Outlined the T Levels that it expected to offer in 2023 and 2024 when the alternative qualifications currently offered are defunded.
- Gave positive feedback on the capital allocations that had been received since the reclassification announcement, which had provided the opportunity to improve the campus and the energy efficiency of buildings.

- Discussed how the Lifelong Loan Entitlement lends itself to the College's strategy of shorter modular qualifications and fewer three-year degrees.
- Expressed concern that the Level 3 reforms were moving forward too quickly and that T Level programmes were being rolled out before they were fully tested. The College faces the potential loss of up to 1400 students including borderline Level 3 students that would not cope with the academic level of a T Level, and Level 1 and 2 students unable to progress to Level 3. The availability of staff with the specialisms to teach T Levels was also a concern.
- Highlighted that the Lifetime Skills Guarantee is restricted to Level 3 and that the stepping stone qualifications are not funded in the same way.
- Commented on the large volumes required to sign up to Skills Bootcamps
- Reported that with one exception the strengths cited in December 2021 were still strengths, and that there were a number of new or additional strengths. The College's financial health was forecast to drop to Requires Improvement at the end of this financial year.
- Reported that the challenges cited in December 2021 were still challenges. The 'Covid generation' were making far more demands on student Service and Support than ever, and the difficulties around staff recruitment and retention were still a challenge. New challenges included energy costs.
- Discussed the opportunities arising from local infrastructure projects such as Freeport East, the Garden Community and Sizewell C.
- Discussed College improvement and priorities. These included the need to adapt teaching and learning for today's students; the importance of an employer informed, destination led curriculum, which is a strength of the College; and the need to recover balance sheet stability and improve financial resilience.
- Concluded by setting out five take-away messages for DfE.

It was reported that the Head of Further Education Territorial Team had raised the Building Colleges for the Future legacy issues and the significant impact it continues to have on the College. He undertook to have a further conversation with banks about college loans and at whether something more specific could be done for Colchester Institute because of the impact it was still having.

Governors asked what DfE officers had said about the potential loss of 1400 students under the Level 3 reforms. It was reported that they had not made any specific comment. A letter would be written summarising the conversation, which would be shared with the FE Commissioner and senior officials at the DfE, and that they will be drawing out common threads from the annual strategic conversations. It is the belief of the AoC (Association of Colleges) that DfE understand the risks and want to support colleges but is not able to persuade Treasury. Senior Staff were due to meet Will Quince MP the following week and would repeat some of the key messages from the ASC. It is hoped that colleges and union officials will be able to get Back Bench MPs to put pressure on Government to make some changes.

Arising from the discussion it was reported that in some colleges retention on T Levels was less than 50% of the students that start in the first year. Poor progression opportunities were also an issue. UCAS points were now available for the work placement, but students have difficulty getting accepted by universities.

The Principal reported that 103 Principals and Chief Executives had now added their signature to a letter which she had co-authored, and which they were trying to get published in a broadsheet newspaper to get the debate into the public arena. Without being negative about T Levels, the letter asks for the defunding of alternative courses to be paused until T Levels have been evaluated.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Mark Davies and Jasmin Patel.

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 22nd February 2023 (CIC/23/3/1) were received and approved as an accurate record.

5. **Matters arising from the Minutes**

CIC/23/3/2, Corporation Board Action Sheet, was received and noted. The Corporation Chair reported that he still needed to reflect on the balance between scrutiny and strategy on Board agendas.

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

CIC/23/3/3, Report on the Application of the Seal of the Corporation, was received and noted.

7. **Strategic Plan – One Year Action Plan 2023**

7.1. **Update on Strategic Plan One Year Action Plan**

CIC/23/3/4, Update on Strategic Plan Goals – March/April 2023, was received and noted.

7.2. **Special Focus on Goal 3 (Curriculum Design)**

CIC/23/3/5, Deep Dive – Strategic Plan Goal 3, was received. The Principal introduced this discussion item by reporting that:

- Progress against the success indicators was variable.
- More work was required around 'developing the whole person' and extending pastoral and enrichment activities to adults.
- The funding allocation for adults next year would be slightly smaller than the current year. If the growth in this area were to continue it might be necessary to make decisions around what to deliver.
- The College Executive were currently looking closely at the Adult offer. Governors' attention was drawn the final page of the paper, and the points on which the College Executive would welcome governors' views as they work towards finalising the curriculum plans for adults in 2023/24. These included the balance of provision that is offered on-line and in-person; the balance between apprenticeships and classroom based delivery; and the balance between programmes that have high social value but low achievement and courses where results are better and students progress.
- Essex Adult and Community Learning were starting to replicate a lot of the work that Colchester Institute delivers through the Adult Skills Centres at Dovercourt, Clacton and the Colchester and Braintree campuses. This may provide an opportunity to reduce some of that activity in what is a shrinking market because the levels of employment were high.

In response to a question, it was reported that the adult curriculum was largely funded through the Adult Education Budget. It included professional development to upskill individuals, ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages), short basic skills courses for unemployed learners, and focussed courses such as Building Heroes. Apprenticeships was an important part of the adult offer.

Governors questioned the College Executive on the one-year actions/activities aimed at ensuring the learning of adult learners extends beyond the qualifications they have signed up to, where current progress had not yet had sufficient impact. It was reported that:

- The Student Liaison Officer was very proactive in putting on a range of enrichment activities every week but student engagement, both 16-19 and adults, is low.
- Students who attend evening classes for three hours a week do not want to do other activities such as British Values, which is a challenge.

- Suffolk New College was highly successful in getting adult students to engage in these wider activities. Four members of the Senior Leadership Team were due to visit the college to learn more about their approach.
- Aspects of British Values and integration into British society are directly addressed in ESOL courses. Examples were given of the issues that the College had tried to address with these learners during the current year.

Arising from the discussion, Governors:

- Commented that the success indicators and activities were quite broad and generic and suggested that for future 'deep dives' it would be helpful if the written commentary provided more detail to aid their understanding.
- Questioned if the students had been asked for their views on the balance of provision that is in-person and on-line. It was reported that this data was available but had not been disaggregated for 16-18 and adult learners. An update would be provided at the next meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee.
- Commented that they would like to see more focus on the student voice and qualitative feedback from students.

In respect of the review of the strategy for the College's adult provision for next year, a Governor commented that consideration should also be given to the cost of delivery and whether resources could be redeployed. Governors were reassured that one of the key actions from the last meeting of the College Executive was to look at the contribution from adult courses. Governors discussed whether there should be a minimum contribution level for courses that have high social value but low return, and if so, what it should be. **Action:** It was agreed to pick this up at the next Board planning day.

Noting the wide ranging nature of Goal 3, a Governor suggested splitting elements into separate goals. The Deputy Chief Executive responded that a better way forward might be to provide more detail in the narrative to the business plan for next year on enrichment; courses that are not going to run for reasons of financial contribution; and projects that are going to be delivered because they support a specific need.

A Member questioned if there was evidence to support the move to more micro-qualifications in HE. It was reported that this had the full backing of the University of East Anglia, industry support., and was being trialled by UCC for construction companies.

Governors asked for the deep dive into Strategic Plan Goal 7 (Human Resources), currently scheduled for the autumn term, to be brought forward to the July Board meeting. **Action:** Clerk/Deputy Chief Executive

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

CIC/23/3/6, Accountability Statement 2023 to 2024, was received and considered. Governors saw a first draft of the Accountability Statement at the Board meeting in February 2023. Governors' attention was drawn to section 5.1, which mapped existing provision and future opportunities to the priorities in the Local Skills Improvement Plan (SLIP) for Essex, which had been issued in late March 2023. It also mapped the national priorities set by the DfE where they overlapped with the local priorities. It was reported that the Statement had to be submitted to the DfE by the end of May, and also published on the College's website.

Governors asked if the College had liaised with key stakeholders when producing the Statement. The Principal responded that they had discussed the Statement with Essex Country Council the previous week, and had drawn on other local skills plans, the Colchester Economic Strategy, and the North Essex Economic Board plan.

The Board APPROVED the Accountability Statement for 2023 to 2024.

9. **2023-24 Applications and Curriculum Plan – Further Education**

It was reported that the College would be funded for 3750 16-18 learners in 2023-24 and the College was confident of achieving that number based on a conservative curriculum plan. This year saw a significant growth in Public Services and Wood Occupations. At Colchester, Salon Studies enrolled half the normal number of learners and Music and Performing Arts declined by one third from a low base, reflecting the marginalisation of those subjects in the secondary school curriculum. It was expected that the full range of courses would run at Colchester next year, with the exception of Level 3 Photography and Level 3 Visual Effects. Neither subject ran in 2022-23 and will not be included in the next prospectus. At Braintree College 16-18 numbers were very similar to the current year. Areas of concern were Level 3 Early Years and Level 2 Beauty Therapy. Both courses were projected to have fewer than ten enrolments.

It was reported that a significant number of learners travel from Braintree to Colchester to study because it is a better campus and there is the opportunity to go into the City. This had been discussed at the last Board Planning day, and Governors were interested to learn about any follow up action. It was reported that the Progress and Destination Tutors had been asked to talk to every group about why they had chosen to attend the Braintree Campus. This had also been followed up at Principal's Question Time events. The findings reinforced existing beliefs. Students want to go where their friends are going or want to get away from Braintree. Location and distance from the station were also an issue. It was reported that meetings were being held with seven Heads of Areas to look at what could be done to make the 16-18 offer in their subject distinctly different to that offered by other providers. Examples included significant employer involvement or units that are not available in school sixth form provision.

10. **Safeguarding Report**

CIC/23/3/7, Safeguarding Report, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Student Services and Support. It was reported that:

- There continued to be a high level of student demand, and the Team continue to support a high level of students on suicide plans.
- An additional counsellor had joined the College the previous week. Funded through the North East Essex Integrated Care Board, the postholder will work 14 hours per academic week until April 2024.
- There had been a general increase in recreational drug use. In line with the College's zero tolerance approach, the normal action would be to exclude anyone found in possession on drugs on campus. An example was given of when and how individual circumstances had been carefully considered to ensure that a decision to exclude the student did not have unintended consequences or be seen as too harsh a stance.
- There was a renewed focus on safer recruitment to ensure that everyone who works or volunteers at the College has the appropriate level of checks, references, and risk assessments in place to work with students and vulnerable adults.

In response to a question on how the College's stance on the possession of drugs, which they supported, compared to other educational providers it was reported that the policies of other colleges had not been reviewed. The College has a zero tolerance approach to drugs, alcohol and weapons, and learners had been excluded for all of these reasons during the current academic year. It was reported that how College expectations are communicated to students at the start of the academic year would be reviewed.

Governors noted that the Safeguarding Report had previously been considered by the Curriculum and Quality Committee and asked if the Committee had any insights or recommendations to bring to their attention. Members of the Committee reported that:

- The Student Welfare Team were facing increasing challenges as a result of the under-funding of external agencies and the increase in waiting times following a referral and the point at which the student's needs are met.
- There was also a renewed focus on mandatory safeguarding training, and increase in the target for compliance rates, which had been welcomed by the Committee.
- The Committee had questioned the size and nature of staff recruitment panels and had asked that this was made clear in the Safer Recruitment Policy.
- The Committee has a high degree of confidence in the Vice Principal: Student Services and Support and her Team and were reassured that they were doing everything that they can with the available resources.

Arising from his discussion with the ESFA the previous day, the Chair reported that parents no longer value education, and issues around attendance and discipline were being seen in children of all age groups from age 4/5 through to age 15/16. Governors noted with concern the immense pressure on the Welfare Team from the caseload they were currently dealing with, which was likely to get worse given the high levels of mental anguish in school children, and asked about future planning and who cares for the staff that support these students. It was reported that it was a very close knit team that support each other. They also have supervision and are supported by higher management. Safeguarding was an area which the College had invested in over the last two years. This had enabled the recruitment of additional Safeguarding Officers and of additional people to specifically look after children in care. Governors expressed their appreciation for the work that the Welfare Team were doing.

Governors were interested in the statistics by category for the three year period 2020/21 to 2022/23, and noted that the issues facing the College were not necessarily reflective of those driven by the safeguarding and prevent framework. For example, there had been no cases of radicalisation/extremism during this period. Governors questioned how the College showcases to the public everything it does to look after those who come to Colchester Institute. It was reported that there was a range of information for students and parents on the website. **Action:** The Vice Principal: Student Services and Support agreed to review the information on the website.

The Vice Principal: Student Services and Support reported that she had been invited to talk to the Rotary Club about welfare and student finance as a way of getting more income to the College's charity CIFT (Colchester Institute Foundation Trust) to support students.

11. Reports from Committee

11.1. Curriculum and Quality Committee

The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee presented his written report (CIC/23/3/8). It was reported that:

- Key themes from the meeting on 18th April 2023 were issues around the lack of consistency in terms of attendance, retention and outcomes. Areas that were performing well were doing very well, and the difference between the highest achieving areas and the lowest was quite wide.
- The Head of English and Math had produced a detailed analysis of GCSE attendance 2022-23 which had enabled the Committee to drill down into the data. Looking at attendance in maths, the Committee was surprised to find that there was very little difference in terms of academic ability on entry and that attendance for girls was lower than for boys.
- The results of the January BTEC exams were positive, with 98% of attendees obtaining a pass grade or better.
- The National Achievement Rate Tables published in March gave the first opportunity in the last three years to see how Colchester Institute performed against other providers. 16-19 Study Programme rates overall were ahead of the average for both achievement and retention. 19+ programmes were slightly behind the average and Apprenticeship achievement, whilst down, remained above the national average.

The Board received and noted:

- CIC/23/3/9, Curriculum and Quality Updated Report
- CIC/23/3/10, Update on Progress against the Quality Improvement Plan
- CIC/23/3/11, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Annual Report 2021/22

11.2. **Audit and Risk Committee**

The Chair of the Audit and Risk Committee presented her written report (CIC/23/3/12). The Board's attention was drawn to the following points:

- The Committee had received a number of Internal Audit reports which had received substantial and reasonable assurance opinions.
- The Committee had noted some good practice in the review of Recruitment and Training but were concerned at the weaknesses also identified in the report. The Committee had noted the actions that were being taken in response to the report, and asked for an update in terms of implementing the recommendations at the next meeting.
- The Committee had received the Value for Money Report for 2021/22 which was excellent in terms of quantitative aspects of value for money, and asked for future reports to bring in relevant qualitative performance measure outcomes so the Committee can be assured of the College's position in a more rounded way.
- The Committee had considered the Health and Safety Committee Annual Report 2021/22 and did not identify any notable areas of concern.

The Board received and noted CIC/23/3/13, Health and Safety Committee Annual Report 2021/22.

11.3. **Finance and Resources Committee**

11.3.1. **Report from Chair of the Committee**

The Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee presented his written report (CIC/23/3/14). The Board's attention was drawn to the following points:

- The Committee had reviewed and approved the College Estates and Accommodation Strategy 2022-23. Governors were encouraged to review this important strategy document, which is updated annually.
- As a result of the management restructure a thorough review of all HR activities, policies and procedures was underway, but there was still a lot of work to do. In response to findings in a recent internal audit report the Committee had been given assurances by the College Executive that all statutory requirements were currently being met.

11.3.2. **Pre-Budget Forecast 2023/24**

The Committee had received a pre-budget forecast for 2023/24 and had challenged some of the income assumptions. The Board was asked to note that it would be difficult to achieve a balanced balance next year. It was reported that the Committee had indicated that it would not be averse to a planned loss for a second year if it could be seen that there would be a recovery in 2024/25, particularly if the planned loss involved a further increase in staff pay. The Deputy Chief Executive expressed a view that the College should be looking to generate a surplus in 2023/24 to improve cash reserves and to help mitigate the potential loss of up to 1400 students as a result of the roll out of T Levels in the following year.

11.3.3. **Monthly Management Report**

CIC/23/3/15, Monthly Management Report and Accounts February 2023 [Period 7], was received and noted. The Committee Chair drew the Board's attention to the March 2023 Management Report, which had been circulate the previous day. It was reported that the forecast year end operating loss had increased as a result of an increase in non-pay costs, in

particular the increase in the energy standing charge, and shortfall in income as a result of withdrawals and problems with End Point Assessments.

11.3.4. **Update on Property Issues**

The Deputy Chief Executive reported that:

- Work on the installation of the photovoltaic panels at the Colchester campus was 80% complete and work had started at the Braintree campus the previous day. Both installations would be operational by the end of May and would give the College over 1000 panels across the organisation, which should achieve savings in energy costs of over £120k pa.
- The College was currently seeking prices for summer works that were being funded by grant allocations.
- The College had met with Essex County Council the previous week to discuss their potential support for delivering the longer term masterplan for new facilities.

11.3.5. **UCC Fee Policy 2023-24**

CIC/23/3/16, University Centre Colchester (UCC) Fee Policy 2023-2024, was received, considered and APPROVED.

11.4. **Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee**

The Chair of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee presented his written report (CIC/23/3/17).

It was reported that FE Associates had been engaged to support the search for the next Corporation Chair. Applications had closed on 18th April, and three potential candidates had met informally with the Principal and current Chair prior to that date. The Principal provided feedback on each potential candidate. Formal interviews with a small panel of Governors were due to take place on 22nd May. Given that this is a Board appointment, it was proposed and AGREED that a Special Board meeting should be held on 24th May to received for approval the recommendation of the interview panel.

The Board was reminded that:

- The Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee were currently searching for new members to replace three Governors that would be retiring during the autumn term. Governors were asked to continue to explore networks for possible suitable candidates.
- The retiring Governors would create vacancies for a Corporation Board Vice Chair and Chairs of the Finance and Resources Committee and Curriculum and Quality Committee. Governors interested in taking on these roles were asked to contact the Corporation Chair or the Clerk.

12. **Review of Effectiveness of Meeting**

The Board reviewed the effectiveness of the meeting.

13. **Next Meeting**

Wednesday, 26th July 2023 at 4.30pm at the Colchester Campus. The meeting will be preceded with a Board briefing at 4.00pm.

14. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.