

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee  
held on 18th April 2023

**Present**

Kevin Prince, in the Chair  
Alison Andreas  
Peter Cook  
Debbie Davis  
Angela O'Donoghue

Brenda Rich  
Terry Smyth  
Dawn Swainson  
Jenny Thorpe  
Caroline Williams

**In Attendance**

Maeve Borges	Vice Principal: Student Services and Support
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. **Agreement to Starred Agenda Items**

Members were invited to indicate any items which they wished to star for discussion or question. Items that were not starred were noted and/or approved by the Committee without discussion.

4. **Minutes**

The minutes of the meeting held on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2023 (CIC/CQ/23/2/1) were received and approved as an accurate record.

5. **Action Sheet and Matters Arising from the Minutes**

CIC/CQ/23/2/2, Curriculum and Quality Committee action sheet, was received and noted.

It was reported that, as a result of a suggestion by Governors at an earlier meeting, two changes had been made to the UCC student survey:

- (i) The questions for the January end of semester survey had been adapted to reflect more of the teaching and learning questions in the NSS (National Student Survey).
- (ii) In the summer, first and second year students would complete a mock NSS survey instead of a module survey.

6. **Curriculum and Quality Update Report**

CIC/CQ/23/2/3, Curriculum and Quality Update Report, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum Planning and Quality.

It was reported that attendance patterns, particularly in English and maths, were still an area of concern, as was the general commitment of students to their course.

The Committee welcomed the detailed analysis of GCSE attendance, which had been prepared in response to questions at the last meeting, and the recent visit by the link Governor, and noted the

trends and actions that were being taken such as working with Area Heads. Governors question the rationale for the recommendation around enabling Course Teams to easily track when and where students' GCSE classes are taking place. It was reported that the issue was the number of cancelled classes each week because of staff attendance. However, it was a marginal point which accounted for no more than 1% of attendance issues. Students should have the App which updates when classes change to a new venue. The main problem was that there were students who will not attend the classes.

Governors asked what the College would do, if resources were no object, to improve results in English and maths and were advised that it would increase contact hours, particularly in maths. However, the College is not able to recruit sufficient maths teachers and could not afford to pay for the extra hours. Students receive 1.75 taught hours a week which is not enough, in most cases, to move them from a Grade 3 to Grade 4. Governors asked about online resources. It was reported that the College subscribes to an online course and although student take up was reasonable during 2020/21, when education was severely disrupted by the pandemic, participation was now severely low. As such it was almost certain that the College Executive would withdraw this resource. It was acknowledged that free resources might be available as additional support for students who were motivated, but the College would not be able to monitor student participation.

Governors noted that despite the best efforts of staff they had not managed to overcome the issues of poor attendance and behaviour reported at previous meetings. It was reported that the challenges facing the College this year were part of a national trend and difficult to turn around. Delivery staff were supporting the students in every way they could, and the Executive were hopeful that, with the mitigating actions being taken, the majority of learners would be able to progress and achieve, despite these issues.

It was reported that with a huge amount of effort the College was able to keep attendance at between 85.5% and 86% but could not improve it. Data from partner schools, where attendance is a legal obligation, was lower. It was reported that students were leaving for economic reasons and that just that week two students who were doing well on their course had left because they needed to be earning money. Governors noted the issues and expressed their hope that these young people would return to education at some point in the future.

In a response to questions, it was confirmed that the College does have an English and maths strategy document, which is reviewed annually, and that the risks are included in the Corporate Risk Register and Departmental Risk Registers and regularly reviewed.

It was reported that achievement rates in the January BTEC exams were positive. There were no surprises in the National Achievement Rate Tables, published just before Easter. The College was pleased to see that 16-19 Study Programmes and apprenticeships were both above the national average. As in previous years the results for Adults were below the national average, largely due to the choice of programmes.

Governors noted that the BTEC January Series 2023 results included quite a high proportion of near passes and asked about the potential impact on overall achievement. It was reported that students were encouraged to resit, and information on the opportunity to ask for a re-mark is sent out to students and parents. Last year, the College Executive took the decision to offer students with near passes free resits, but the students did not turn up for the exams.

## **7. Teaching and Learning Survey 2022-23**

CIC/CQ/23/2/4, Teaching and Learning Survey 2022-23, was received and presented by the Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum Planning and Quality. It was reported that the reasons behind some of the lower satisfaction rates were directly linked to ongoing staffing issues. An example was given of disruption in an area where there was a lack of experience in the team, and only one member had

been teaching for more than one year. The reputational risk of students expressing their dissatisfaction outside the College were noted.

Governors suggested that in terms of self-improvement it would be more useful to rank areas in terms of their relative increase or decline compared to the previous year, rather than in comparison to the previous year across the whole College. The example was given of an area which had increased its satisfaction rate from 79% in the prior year to 92%, a significant achievement, but not the top ranked area. It was reported that the table was for Board use only to help Governors triangulate information from other reports presented to the meeting.

It was reported that the apprenticeship data needed to be treated with caution because the results had been skewed by a number of students who were not apprentices answering questions for apprentices.

Arising from the discussion it was acknowledged by the Executive that some of the departments are very large and that it would be more useful to provide information at subject rather than department level so that specific issues impacting a particular area are more easily identified.

The actions that were being taken in response to survey results were noted.

#### 8. **Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan**

CIC/CQ/23/2/5, Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan, was received and presented by the Principal. In response to feedback at the last meeting, more narrative had been included to provide context. It was reported that progress was being made against all six goals.

Governors' attention was drawn to Goal 6 (address areas of poor performance identified at curriculum level to raise levels of achievement to within 5% of College target) where progress was mixed. It was reported that performance in Motor Vehicle and Construction apprenticeships was better than the prior year. A Governor expressed surprise that the College had not achieved the target for young learners on Science and Health and Social care programmes, given the capital investment over the last year, the good relationship between the College and ESNEFT (East Suffolk and North Essex NHS Foundation Trust), and the work placement opportunities, and asked what action was being taken. The Principal acknowledged that it was disappointing. It was reported that two learners had left that week to go into work and other pressures in that subject area included the impact of sitting exams mid-year and year end which did not take place in applied general qualifications a few years ago. The medium-term solution was the development of teachers that are inexperienced, which would take time.

Referring to Goal 6, and the next steps, a Governor observed that if, as discussed, tackling achievement rates required investment in the teaching team, it would be helpful for that to be stated so progress can be measured.

Governors noted the use of close marking (the practice of taking one paragraphs of a student's work and marking it thoroughly for spelling and grammar, rather than repeating the marking throughout) and questioned if this practice was evidence-based. It was reported that this was a minimum expectation and had been well received in teaching areas. It cuts down the work of the marker and can work very well so long as the learners understand the need to check through the rest of the document.

#### 9. **Safeguarding Report**

CIC/CQ/23/2/6, Safeguarding Report, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Student Services and Support. It was reported that:

- The number of safeguarding cases and themes were similar to prior years.

- There was an increase in the number of students with more complex backgrounds and needs which were taking up a lot of the time of Safeguarding Officers. The Vice Principal gave examples of the type of cases the Team had been dealing with.
- There had been an increase in the number of cases for students within the 14-16 category (the College has one small cohort of 14-16 learners)
- There were still a number of people on suicide prevention plans.
- The College had received funding from the North East Essex Integrated Care Board for an additional counsellor to provide support for the next 12 months.
- There had been a much higher number of stop and searches on the student body this year. Members of the Security Team had been into curriculum areas to talk to teaching staff about the support that they can offer.

Governors welcomed the additional counsellor for 14 hours per week funded by the Integrated Care Board, but asked how the College would plan for services after April 2024 when this support ends. It was reported that the College would be asked to provide feedback on the impact of this funded support and it was possible that subsequent funding could be available from this or another source.

A member asked the current waiting times following a referral to CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Team). It was reported that this depended on the needs of the student and could be between three and six months.

Governors asked about the increase in cases in the 14-16 category and whether these were the type of students impacted by the disruption to a significant part of their secondary education because of the Covid pandemic. It was reported that this year there had been a number of safeguarding concerns that had not been adequately shared prior to the learner coming to the College. The service level agreement with the schools was being reviewed and going forward the College wants to be able to establish a full history of known concerns to inform a decision on whether the student can be supported.

The Committee extended its thanks to the Vice Principal and her team for everything that they were doing to support students.

#### 10. **Policy Review**

It was reported that following feedback from an internal audit review, a policy review had been carried out to ensure the College was doing everything it should in terms of safer recruitment practices. The Committee's attention was drawn to the key changes in the Safer Recruitment Policy and the Vetting Checks and Single Central Record Policy. It was reported that following approval of the policies the Vice Principal: Student Services and Support would deliver a session to members of the College Leadership and Management Group on the responsibilities of managers and the HR Department.

Governors noted the reference in the Safer Recruitment Policy to appointments normally being made to the minimum point of the College's pay scale and questioned how realistic this was given the current pressures on staff recruitment. It was reported that this reference was included to provide transparency on the decision-making process and that not everyone would start at the minimum point.

A member suggested including a statement in the Safer Recruitment Policy on the number of staff needed on an interview panel. It was reported that there was always a minimum of two members on an interview panel, including one person trained in safer recruitment. [Note: following the meeting it was found that page 5 of the policy included the statement: 'Interviews will be undertaken by a minimum of two people to ensure objectivity']

The Committee received, considered and APPROVED:

- CIC/CQ/23/2/7, Safer Recruitment Policy,
- CIC/CQ/23/2/8, Vetting Checks and Single Central Record Policy

11. **Prevent Strategy**

CIC/CQ/23/2/9, Prevent Strategy, was received, considered and APPROVED. It was noted that the level of change for this annual update was low and that there were no changes to the College's statutory obligations or published guidance at this stage.

12. **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2021/22**

CIC/CQ/23/2/10, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report 2021/22, was received and presented by the Principal.

Governors commented on the high number of blank fields in the current workforce data in respect of disability. It was reported that this was not a question that has previously been asked of current employees and one of the actions was around extending the current data gathering.

A Member commented that the data analysis was fairly high level, and suggested that there should be more analysis of the data, either in this document or elsewhere, to identify gaps. **Action:** it was agreed to add an additional action to the action plan regarding closer analysis and action planning of student achievement gaps in future years.

Governors noted that for staff on zero hours and part time contracts the difference in gender was to an extent a reflection of society, but asked if there was anything the College should be doing to try to improve the balance. It was reported that a large percentage of these roles were Learning Support Practitioners, which males less commonly applied for.

Governors asked about the age profile of staff and were advised that it was particularly impacted by teachers in their second and subsequent careers. Younger people tended to be recruited into support roles.

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

CIC/CQ/23/2/11, Update on Strategic Plan One Year Action Plan, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that:

- Decent progress was being made in terms of addressing the actions identified to achieve the one-year success indicators.
- The Senior Leadership Team would be discussing Goal 3 (Curriculum) later that week to get a sense of progress on this Goal and to inform a deep dive review of the Goal at the next Board meeting.
- The actions under Goal 4, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), had been updated to reflect the EDI Report and action plan.

Governors asked how the College was doing in terms of maximising the recent re-development of the Braintree Campus (Goal 8). It was reported that there was nothing in the applications for September 2023 to suggest a sea change in enrolments. The College needs to look at what it can do at individual curriculum level to make the provision at Braintree distinctive, mindful of what else is available in that area. The Campus is competing with Colchester, Chelmsford and West Suffolk colleges. In response to a question, it was confirmed that the Campus is sustainable for the foreseeable future, but there was a need to diversify the curriculum with more adult courses and apprenticeship provision.

14. **Review of Meeting**

Members reviewed the effectiveness of the meeting, potential areas for improvement, and agreed items to be reported to the Board. In particular it was agreed to draw to Board's attention to the variability in predicted achievement rates, linked to attendance and the inexperience of some staff which was having an impact on the student experience, which were themes through a number of papers received by the Committee.

15. **Date of Next Meeting**

Wednesday, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2023 at 4.30pm.

16. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.