

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee
held on 16th November 2023
at the Colchester campus and on Teams

Present

Caroline Williams, in the Chair
Alison Andreas
Peter Cook
Thomas Empson

Kevin Prince
Brenda Rich
Dawn Swainson

In Attendance

Maeve Borges Vice Principal: Student and Information Services
Hazel Paton Clerk to the Governors

Observer

Marco Iciek

- 1. Apologies for Absence**
Apologies for absence were received from Angela O'Donoghue.
- 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 28th June 2023 (CIC/CQ/23/4/1) were received and approved as an accurate record. The Chair signed the minute book.
- 5. Action Sheet and Matters Arising from the Minutes**
CIC/CQ/23/4/2, Curriculum and Quality Committee action sheet, was received and noted.

Governors that had attended the departmental SAR/QIP (Self-Assessment Report/Quality Improvement Plan) validation meetings were asked if they agreed that the targets in the departmental QIP were measurable, and that the action from the last meeting relating to this could be closed. Governors agreed that the departmental QIPs that they had seen were very good, with some more detailed than others, but that it was the role of Senior Managers to judge whether the targets within individual departments were ambitious enough and measurable. The Principal confirmed that the meetings had been quite rigorous in terms of the measurability of targets and the targets were better than in previous years.

Governors had noted some common themes in the validation meetings, such as an increase in the number of students with mental health and wellbeing concerns. To avoid duplication, it was suggested that staff should work collaboratively to come up with solutions. It was agreed that Governors who are linked to a curriculum area should be sent the SAR and QIP for their link area.

Action: Clerk

6. **Self-Assessment Report 2022-23 and Quality Improvement Plan 2023-24**

CIC/CQ/23/4/3, Self-Assessment Report 2022-23 and Quality Improvement Plan 2023-24, was received and discussed.

A Member unable to attend the meeting had submitted written comments to the Clerk which were read out to the meeting. It was noted that the Member was happy with the Self-Assessment Report but would hope to see some measurable quantifiable targets added to the actions set out in the QIP so that the College can measure whether the action taken has had an impact. The Principal responded that each goal had a final SMART target which was measurable. Whilst some of the actions lent themselves to a measurable target it may not be possible to add measurable targets to all the actions. An example was given of where this would be difficult. This led to a wide ranging discussion on what the measures for success would be for some of the actions.

The Committee noted that the strengths and areas for improvement identified in the report were largely the same as in the previous year and asked the Senior Leaders to look at the wording of these, with a view to showing where the College was making progress.

The Committee questioned whether the section on Leadership and Management should include reference to the need to increase capacity in the senior leadership. The Principal responded that this report reflected where the College was in 2022-23 before the unexpected absence of the Deputy Principal, but she agreed to consider whether it was appropriate to include something in the report.

Governors noted that the actions in the QIP do not explicitly address the areas for improvement identified in the SAR. Members felt that it would be helpful to the reader if the relationship between the actions and the areas for improvement were identified.

Governors observed that the most recent national rates were not always available in the data tables and asked for these to be added to the report. The Principal responded that the national data that relates to Colchester Institute structures could be added, but for some subjects it was not clear what the comparable national measure would be. Accountancy was given as an example of where this would be difficult because the data exists at course level and SSA (Sector Subject Areas) only.

Subject to the above the Committee APPROVED the Self-Assessment Report 2022-23 and Quality Improvement Plan 2023-24 for recommendation to the Board.

7. **Compliments and Complaints 2022-23**

CIC/CQ/23/4/4, Compliments and Complaints 2022-23, was received and considered. Governors noted that the focus of the report was on complaints that had been received during the year with very little information on compliments. Members questioned whether the College should be doing more with the compliments that are received and communicating them more widely.

Action:

- The Senior Leadership Team was asked to reflect on this.
- The Committee would like to see a section in the report next year on compliments.

Governors noted that three complaints had been received which related to the College's handling of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs). Governors were interested to know if these complaints involved high needs students and asked for this information to be included in future reports.

Action: Quality Manager.

In response to a question, it was reported that EHCPs continue until a student reaches the age of 25, and students aged 19-24 with an EHCP are funded as if they are a 16-18 learner.

8. **Update on Enrolments**

The Principal reported that it had been a positive start to year. It was reported that:

- The College recorded 3829 FE full time learners in the RO3 return in early November, compared to a funding target of 3750. This was about 53 higher than at the same point in the previous year. The College might lose more students before the RO4 return. Based on the pattern of withdrawals in the prior year the College could end the year about 30 students down on the RO3 position, which would provide growth for 2024-25.
- Nationally some colleges are reporting a greater level of growth this year.
- The targets of 398 apprenticeship starts by the end of October had been achieved.
- The College had achieved 173 HE full time enrolments against a target of 186, and 104 part time students against a target of 102. The financial impact of the under-recruitment was about £150k.
- The UCC curriculum plan included 28 apprenticeship starts, mostly in Engineering, but also in Management. Actual apprenticeship starts were 39.
- It was too early in the year to report on adult provision, although there had been a strong start in ESOL (English for Speakers of other Languages).

Governors asked if the increase in student numbers were confined to particular curriculum areas, requiring additional staffing. It was reported that no areas needed to recruit more staff. In some areas, there were fewer Level 3 and more Level 2 groups than planned because the learners did not meet the entry criteria for Level 3. It was reported that more students need to resit English and maths GCSEs because of the movement of grade boundaries.

9. **Learner Surveys**

9.1. **NSS (National Student Survey) Analysis 2022-23**

CIC/CQ/23/4/5, NSS (National Student Survey) Analysis 2022-23, was received and noted. Governors were reminded that only final year HE students complete the survey, and certain thresholds had to be met for the data to be published. Governors were pleased to note that the outcomes were better than in the previous year, and were getting closer to national averages. The results for Learning Resources were much better, reflecting the significant investment that had been made in areas such as Engineering, Computer Facilities, and Construction.

Governors asked about the student voice and how the College provides feedback to current students on what has been done to address concerns flagged up in the NSS. It was reported that there is student voice at every level within the academic structure. It was reported that, in response to a suggestion that had been made at a previous meeting of this Committee, the NSS survey was now used internally for students in their first and second year.

Governors noted that being on teach out may have impacted the learner satisfaction rates in Creative Arts. In response to a question, it was confirmed that this would be on the HE risk register, but not necessarily on the Corporate Risk Register. **Action:** the Principal acknowledged that this might be a reputational risk and agreed to look at whether this needed to be elevated to the Corporate Risk Register.

9.2. **FE Induction Survey 2023-24**

CIC/CQ/23/4/6, FE Student Induction Survey 2023/24, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that a Curriculum Quality and Student Experience meeting earlier that week had focussed on the Self-Assessment Report and Student Survey. At the meeting, which was held on Teams, Curriculum Leads had been asked to (i) go into the detailed subject level data and look at the

achievement gaps by gender, ethnicity and declared learning difficulties; and (ii) look at course level survey outcomes and where they were not in line with College averages add a statement and actions to their QIP. In both cases, Heads were asked to look at whether their QIP needed updating to include actions to address either achievement gaps or issues arising from the survey data.

Governors were pleased to note that 98% of respondents said that they were on the right course, and 98% of learners know who to speak to if there is a safeguarding concern. Governors asked what was being done to help the 63 learners (2%) who feel that they are on the wrong course. It was reported that it was not possible to identify students from the survey. However, learners who felt they were on the wrong course were asked what the College could do to help them and asked to leave an email address if they wanted to talk to the Area Head.

A Governor observed that getting 98% of students on the right course was good from a marketing perspective. **Action:** The Vice Principal: Student and Information Services agreed to consider referencing student feedback in the prospectus.

Governors found the appendix (Induction Survey Overall) very useful and suggested making the data available to all Governors, who may want to use it in discussions with their link areas. **Action:** Clerk.

10. Safeguarding

10.1. Safeguarding Report

CIC/CQ/23/4/7, Safeguarding Report, was received and presented by the Vice Principal: Student and Information Services. It was reported that at the request of the Committee Chair, the structure of the report had been changed. The sections on the Single Central Record (SCR) had been moved to the start of the report, reflecting the role of Governors in monitoring the SCR to ensure the safety of students.

Governors noted that seven DBS checks were outstanding, and asked to what extent those individuals were working with learners aged 16-18 or learners up to 25 if they have an EHCP. The Vice Principal did not have that level of information at the meeting, but assured Governors that Risk Assessments were in place for these individuals, and nobody in the College would be with students of any age unsupervised until a DBS has been received. It was reported that the HR Team were proactive in monitoring Risk Assessments, which must be updated every two weeks. The Vice Principal said that for future reports she would look at the length of time someone with a Risk Assessment has been in employment. **Action:** Vice Principal: Student and Information Services.

Governors asked if the Welfare and Safeguarding Team had the resources it needed to respond to the caseload. The Vice Principal responded that due to a vacancy which for a number of reasons had not been filled, and also due to a long-term absence, the answer was currently no. The College Executive had agreed an upgrade for all members of the Team, and the vacant post had been readvertised at a higher pay scale.

Noting the increase in the number of students coming forward with mental health issues, a Governor suggested updating the website to include not only telephone help lines but to signpost Apps such as SilverCloud. It was reported that the College uses services that have been approved by the Essex Safeguarding Board and normally recommends Kooth. **Action:** the Vice Principal agreed to research the available Apps.

It was reported that the workload of the Welfare and Safeguarding Team had accelerated since the report had been written, and many of the referrals that the Team were dealing with related to things that had happened at school. In response to a question about checks on the mental health of staff it was reported that the College had a mental health lead who works across HR and the student body, and the employee assistance programme is strongly promoted to managers and individuals.

10.2. **Safeguarding Policy**

CIC/CQ/23/4/8, Safeguarding Policy, was received, considered and approved for recommendation to the Board. The Committee agreed that the Policy could be published pending final approval by the Board.

11. **Update on Strategic Plan Goals – November 2023**

CIC/CQ/23/4/9, Update on Strategic Plan Goals – November 2023, was received and considered.

Governors noted that the apprenticeship achievement rate targets had not been achieved at the end of 2023, and asked how likely it was that they would be achieved in the current year. It was reported that for the current year 20% of learners had already left the programme without having achieved, and what happens in the period to the end of July would determine how close the College gets to the 67% target. Half termly apprenticeship monitoring meetings have been introduced and some areas were performing well at the first round of meetings. The most recently available national average (54%) is for 2021/22. The target achievement rate for 2023/24 approved by Governors is 67%. In response to a question, it was reported that the national measure is completion of the End Point Assessment (EPA). A particular issue in Higher Education is the number of Professional apprentices that leave after they have achieved the qualification but without completing the EPA.

Progress against Goal 2 (create a teaching and learning environment that encourages reflection on learners and learning) was discussed. It was reported that observations are no longer graded, but qualitative data about Teaching and Learning Observations and Learning Walks had been added. The impact of the actions would be seen in student outcomes. Governors observed that Goal 2 was lighter on impact than the other Goals because of the lack of measures. **Action:** The Principal agreed to look at including “even better if” or “moving forward” Commentary.

12. **Quality Framework Strategy**

CIC/CQ/23/4/10, Quality Framework Strategy, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that the Strategy is updated annually during July/August. Governors’ attention was drawn to Appendix 2, overview of the Quality Assurance and Quality Approval processes and activity. The Principal reported that keeping this activity going in the absence of the Deputy Principal was a challenge. Governors commented that the document was clearly written in terms of purpose, and they liked the way that the quality assurance activity had been linked to the Goals in the Strategic Plan.

Governors noted that there was nothing in the Strategy about Governor involvement in the learner voice and asked for this to be considered for the future. **Action:** Principal

13. **College Response to Teaching Excellence Framework Assessment**

CIC/CQ/23/4/11, College Response to Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), was received and presented by the Principal. The Committee was disappointed to note that the College had been graded Requires Improvement, having previously been graded Silver. It was reported that the outcome was not surprising, given the use of data sets from as far back as 2017 which included some poor ratings by students. The TEF uses a tolerance of around 2 points from national averages and benchmark, but in the case of Learning Resources and Student Engagement with Improvement the data for Colchester Institute was considerably lower than the national average. It was reported that the TEF final report would help UCC identify where significant improvements could be made. The most recent NSS report, received earlier in the meeting, showed that good progress had already been made on resources which was the weakest TEF area.

A Governor asked if an executive summary of the data and key areas of growth and decline in UCC could be pulled together to inform the discussion at the January strategic planning day. It was reported that the TEF outcome reflects a period in time. From September 2024 the College will only

run HE provision in six areas: Construction, Engineering, Business, Early Years, Counselling and Teacher Training. The data sets for the TEF included students from a different demographic on courses in another 12 subject areas that were no longer taught. **Action:** the Principal agreed to look at the data for programmes still offered.

In response to a question, it was reported that the outcome of the TEF was unlikely to have a significant impact on student recruitment given our local market.

14. **Policy Review**

14.1. The Committee received, considered and APPROVED:

- CIC/CQ/23/4/12, UCC Student Protection Plan 2023-24
- CIC/CQ/23/4/13, UCC Quality Assurance Policy
- CIC/CQ/23/4/14, Criminal Convictions and DBS Policy

14.2. The Committee received, considered and APPROVED for recommendation to the Board:

- CIC/CQ/23/4/15, Freedom of Speech Code of Practice and External Speaker Protocol
- CIC/CQ/23/4/16, Review of Scheme of Delegation – approval of policies

15. **Plans to Replace the Deputy Principal**

The Principal updated the Committee on plans to replace the Deputy Principal. It was reported that the current post holder would leave the College in early 2024. To ensure a national field, the vacancy had been placed with AoC jobs. As at the previous Friday, five applications had been received. Final interviews were due to be held on 1st December. As this was a senior post, a Special Board meeting would be called for early December to approve the recommendation of the interview panel.

It was reported that some changes had been made to the Senior Leadership Team. A new role of Assistant Principal: Further Education had been added to the structure, reducing the number of direct reports to the Deputy Principal. The Assistant Principal role would be advertised when the new Deputy Principal has been appointed and could have input to the selection process. It was expected that there would be a high level of interest internally for the Assistant Principal role.

Governors recognised that the Senior Leadership Team and Middle Leaders were under significant pressure as a result of the additional work that they had taken on due to the absence of the Deputy Principal and expressed their appreciation that things were still positive in a very difficult situation.

16. **Date of Next Meeting**

Thursday, 1st February 2024 at 4.30pm on Teams.

17. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.