

Colchester Institute Corporation

Minutes of a Virtual Meeting of the Curriculum and Quality Committee
held on 25th January 2023

Present

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

Terry Smyth
Dawn Swainson
Jenny Thorpe
Caroline Williams

In Attendance

Maeve Borges Vice Principal: Student Services and Support
Caroline Fritz Assistant Principal: Quality, and Teaching and Learning Improvement
Hazel Paton Clerk to the Governors
Jill Wognum Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality

1. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Debbie Davis.

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 24th November 2022 (CIC/CQ/23/1/1/) were received and approved as an accurate record.

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

CIC/CQ/23/1/2, Curriculum and Quality Committee action sheet, was received and noted.

A Member asked if consideration had been given to surveying first and second year HE students using questions based on the NSS (National Student Survey), as suggested at the last meeting. It was confirmed that the Dean of Higher Education had agreed to look at this proposal. **Action:** The Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality agreed to ask for an update at the Academic Board meeting on 26th January.

6. **Curriculum and Quality Update Report**

CIC/CQ/23/1/3, Curriculum and Quality Update Report, was received and discussed.

Governors noted that attendance patterns were an area of concern. The Link Governor for maths commented that he had been surprised at the low levels of attendance he had observed during a recent link visit and asked what support was being provided. It was reported that this was an area where the College did not seem to be making any headway, and that attendance was also sporadic at main qualifications. It was reported that student attendance and the actions that were being taken were discussed during weekly one-to-one meetings with managers and at the recent Progress Boards. The College also writes to parents about their child's poor attendance. Students who were not attending any GCSE classes had started to attend after being warned that they would be withdrawn from their main programme.

It was reported that a further concern with English and math was that students were not undertaking the homework. The College uses Century Teach as a support method, but its use was patchy.

It was reported that low attendance was currently a well-documented national problem for the education sector, with very many schools reporting attendance in the 80% range, which is not normal.

The Executive were asked if students had been asked why they were not attending maths and English classes. It was reported that those conversations were taking place and in certain areas there was still a feeling that students do not see the relevance of these subjects and the College can't get them to see the benefits. Some students are escorted into the sessions, but they then disrupt the lessons for students who could be making better progress.

A Member reported that their College had had some success in celebrating good attendance, looking at attendance in the past few weeks rather than as a whole. It was reported that Colchester Institute had celebrated attendance in the past.

Governors were interested to know if attendance rates at Level 3 were higher than at Level 1 and asked, if attendance continues to be an area of concern, for more granular data to be included in the next report. **Action:** Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality.

Governors questioned why retention data had been compared to the previous year full year retention data rather than at the same point in the prior year. It was reported that currently the system was only able to produce data for the full year. It was the view of the Executive Vice Principal that retention was down on the same period in the prior year and that if this trend continued full year retention would be below 2021-22.

In response to a question, it was confirmed that the attendance of apprentices that come into College is monitored, and attendance data for apprentices who attend regularly could be included in future reports. **Action:** Executive Vice Principal: Curriculum, Planning and Quality.

Governors noted the poor attendance rates at GCSE English and maths, despite the best efforts of the staff, and asked what the implications were for the students, and how this would be viewed by Ofsted. It was reported that potentially fewer students would achieve at the end of the year than in the prior year, and potentially fewer students would progress to the next year or the next level. The College was doing what it could to support and challenge the learners without penalising them. Many of the students that were not attending were citing mental health issues. With regard to Ofsted, it was reported that Inspectors would look at the actions that had been taken and make a judgement on how effective they had been, whilst recognising that there was only so much that could be done. It was reported that in some cases students had been moved on to smaller programmes so they could achieve a qualification and have the option for progression. It was reported that more students had been excluded this year than previously because their behaviour had not been acceptable.

A Member asked if the current industrial action by rail staff had impacted on attendance. That information was not available at the meeting. **Action:** The Vice Principal: Student Services and Support agreed to look into this outside the meeting.

A Member asked whether there had been any decline in attendance at the GCSE resits and January BTEC examinations linked to the attendance issues in the classroom. It was reported that overall attendance had been good. The policy for the November resits was that the learner paid for the resit and the cost was refunded by the College if they achieved a grade 4 or above. This had been a

positive driver. For the BTEC exams, the Course Leaders had worked extremely hard to get the students in, phoning and chasing them up as necessary.

A Member asked how progress check scores were determined. It was reported that benchmark criteria for knowledge, skills and behaviour, were set at course level by vocational experts. In response to follow up questions, it was confirmed that the measures were the same for all students in the same subject area and that as the teachers get to know the students, the expectations of the students were also taken into account. An evaluative report is produced for each learner.

Governors asked how the progress of apprentices was monitored. It was reported that there was a rigorous monitoring system for every individual apprentice. Teachers RAG rate whether an apprentice was on track with their progress on a risk register. The risk register, and actions that had been put in place, was discussed at monitoring meetings which take place every six weeks. Apprentices that attend College and practical classes also had progress check measures.

A Governor challenged the January achievement predictions for 16-18 learners in Electrical and Engineering and was advised that some areas were overly optimistic at this point in the year. Although the College had three years of historic data on what areas had predicted at each progress check point (January, March and June) it was a little difficult at this stage to say how accurate the predictions were going to be.

Governors noted that staffing continued to be fragile and questioned whether a lack of staffing in some areas was having an impact on students achieving. It was reported that the College was managing some quite significant long term sickness by combining classes for theory, use of overtime, and by using the Head of Department, who was on a full time timetable. Learners were not currently being impacted, but they would be if there were further resignations or sickness. The ability of the College to offer full cost work or start new apprenticeships was being impacted.

Noting the increased number of learners suffering with mental health issues, a Governor asked what more, if anything, the College would want to do but could not because of the cost. It was reported that the College offered mental health first aid training for delivery staff, but would like to provide more expert training for the Welfare Team. The Welfare Team had staff with experience of triage, and counselling staff, but were restricted in what they were able to deal with because they do not have anyone with mental health qualifications. The possibility of an educational psychologist or someone with a higher level of training than the current team was being explored through Essex County Council. It was reported that the volume of work was an issue and that external agencies were referring cases back to the College because they were saturated. In response to a question, it was reported that recruiting additional safeguarding and welfare officers was not problem, but it takes time to bring new staff up to speed.

The Link Governor for safeguarding was aware of a model where a psychologist at a hospital worked with the team at a university, visiting on a regular basis and advising on very difficult cases, which seemed to work well.

Governors asked about support for students with low levels of anxiety, such as sessions on exam anxiety. It was reported that the WARMS (Wellbeing and Resilience Mental Health Service) team had run workshops around managing anxiety and low level resilience and last summer the College had held a "de-stressfest" festival.

Governors questioned the Executive on new curriculum initiatives. The reasons for not pursuing a new partnership arrangement following the 'due diligence' stage were noted. It was reported that the main driver for a new partnership arrangement with Cidori was to make as full as use as possible of the Adult Education Budget in an area (teaching assistants) where the College had strengths and expertise and LMI shows that there is high local demand. Cidori would help to source the students, who would be

enrolled as Colchester Institute learners., and also help to source teaching staff for the programme. Internal quality assurance would be provided by Colchester Institute.

In response to a question on the defunding of vocational Level 3 qualifications and T Levels it was agreed to provide an update as a briefing at the next Board meeting.

7. **Supporting Teaching and Learning Improvement**

CIC/CQ/23/1/4, Supporting Teaching and Learning Improvement, was received and discussed.

Governors asked about the process following a 'walkthru', and whether a report would be produced, and recommendations made for improvements in teaching and learning. It was reported that the term walkthru was a brand name given to the development programme which the College subscribed to. It was confirmed that an online observation form was completed after each teaching and learning observation. The observation form included a section which highlighted strengths, weaknesses, and development points. It also included the date agreed for review and the method of review, for example learning walk, further observation, or group discussion.

In response to a question on the sharing of best practice, it was reported that the Learning and Teaching Development day on 1st February would include some areas sharing their approach to developing literacy.

Governors asked if the areas for improvement from the observation process feature in the improvement plan for the year. The Assistant Principal Quality, and Teaching and Learning Improvement reported that the main Quality Improvement Plan was not updated in-year, but Areas have their own improvement plans.

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

CIC/CQ/23/1/5, Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan (QIP), was received and considered. Governors observed that the deliverables in the QIP were descriptive and not measurable, making it difficult for the Committee to understand what impact the activity was having. Governors also felt that more narrative to provide context, and an indication of whether an activity had been achieved within the timeframe, would be helpful. **Action:** the Assistant Principal: Quality, and Teaching and Learning Improvement to consider for future reports.

9. **Safeguarding Policy**

CIC/CQ/23/1/6, Safeguarding Policy, was received, considered, and APPROVED.

10. **Annual Report to the Board**

CIC/CQ/23/1/7, Annual Report to the Board, was received and approved for submission to the Board.

11. **Review of Meeting**

Members reviewed the effectiveness of the meeting, potential areas for improvement, and agreed items to be reported to the Board.

12. **Date of Next Meeting**

Tuesday, 18th April 2023 at 4.30pm

13. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.