

## Colchester Institute Corporation

**Minutes of a Meeting of the Corporation Board  
held on 29<sup>th</sup> February 2024  
at the Colchester Campus**

**Present:**

Kevin Prince, *in the Chair*  
Alison Andreas  
Simon Attwood  
Lisa Blake  
Richard Block  
Chris Donovan

Sally Messenger  
Jasmin Patel  
Brenda Rich  
Dawn Swainson  
Tim Triffitt  
Caroline Williams

**In Attendance:**

Maeve Borges  
Gary Horne  
Hazel Paton

Vice Principal: Student and Information Services  
Deputy Chief Executive  
Clerk to the Governors

**Observer**

Alison Bennett

Head of Governance designate

Alison Bennett and Fiona Chalk were welcomed to the meeting.

**Pre Board Briefing – External Review of Governance**

The meeting was preceded by a feedback session on the External Review of Governance. The final report (CIC/24/2/1) and table of recommendations (CIC/24/2/2) had been circulated with the meeting agenda. The External Reviewer, Fiona Chalk:

- Thanked Governors for their participation and for being so open and honest in their discussions.
- Outlined her background and experience and stressed that review was not an audit, but a developmental process.
- Provided an overview of the report highlights, themes and recommendations.
- Provided examples of good practice for Governors to consider.

This was followed by a group exercise during which Governors prioritised their top three to five recommendations. The Priorities and comments from Governors following this exercise were:

Recommendation 1 - The student voice to be more firmly embedded, with structured opportunities put in place to support this.

Comments included:

- It would be more useful if Governors went into the student environment rather than bringing students into the Board Room, and used link visits and learning walks to hear the student voice.
- Student comments from surveys could be shared with Governors similar to the way quotes from the staff Padlet had been shared at the planning day.
- Need to find ways through Committees and Board meetings to share learning and knowledge. Governors do a lot in terms of activities and visits to departments but do not always write it up and share it

Recommendation 3 - Establish more clearly the advocate role of governors, including management's role in facilitating an ambassadorial function for governors, allowing governors to maximise their networks for the Executive's benefit.

Comments included:

- Governors do not think that they are contributing in the way they expected they would because they are not making use of their networks.
- This is not always about extra work but sometimes about wearing two hats in the day job. This will require work to make sure it happens and happens effectively.

Recommendation 7 - Discontinue the use of 'To Note/For information' as an agenda/report recommendation.

Comments included:

- This is about getting papers and agendas more focussed.
- If an item is just for note or for information we should be asking the question why are we doing it, what do we want to be different as a result of this paper, and clarifying what Governors want out of this paper.
- At the most recent Curriculum and Quality Committee, the Committee Chair had sent the Principal a number of questions in advance. This meant more information was available at the meeting and resulted in a fuller discussion.

Recommendation 14 - Consider setting EDI principles and measure progress against them.

Comments included:

- The College is at the early stage of a journey and is progressing this.

Recommendation 8 - Governors to give greater clarity to the Executive on the question(s) they want each report to answer.

Arising from the discussion it was:

- Reported that Learner Voice and EDI were priorities for the College Executive.
- Agreed that some recommendations could be taken forward quite quickly. Others might take longer to deliver and needed a strategy to take forward. **Action:** Head of Governance to bring a paper to a future Board meeting.

Fiona Chalk was thanked for her input and left the meeting.

1. **Apologies for absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Stephanie Bettinson, Thomas Empson, Marco Iciek and Benjamin Smith.

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 2023 (CIC/24/2/3) were received and approved as an accurate record. The Chair signed the minute book.

CIC/24/2/4, notes of Strategic Planning Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> February 2024, were not available and would be received at the next Board meeting. It was agreed to use the pre-Board briefing slot to think collectively about what actions should come out of that discussion and take the conversation forward.

5. **Matters arising from the minutes**

CIC/24/2/5, Corporation Board Action Sheet, was received and noted. It was confirmed that there would be a further update on the People Proposition action later in the year.

## 6. Chair's Action/Announcement

- 6.1. CIC/24/2/6, Federation of Essex Colleges Commitment Statement, was received, considered and APPROVED. In response to a question, it was reported that FEDEC (Federation of Essex Colleges) had no legal standing or status. The Statement was a commitment statement to work together to meet local needs. FEDEC has been in existence for a number of years. Colleges pay a membership fee to cover costs of co-ordinator/Director. The Principals meet on a regular basis, and there are different sub-groups such as a Marketing Group.
- 6.2. The Chair reported that one Governor had put their name forward to take over as Corporation Chair and asked other Independent Members interested in the role to contact him outside the meeting. Governors would be asked to appoint a Chair Elect at the July Board meeting, to work alongside the Chair in the autumn term and take up the role on 1 January 2025.
- 6.3. It was reported that the Chief Executive of the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) along with several members of the CIOB Committee would be visiting UCC on Wednesday, 20<sup>th</sup> March 2024 to see what the College does and to engage with students, lecturers, employers, and key members of the higher education community. Governors were invited to attend this event, which was scheduled to take place over lunch from 11:45 to 14:30. A formal invitation would be circulated to Board members outside the meeting.

## 7. Strategic Plan – One Year Action Plan

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

CIC/24/2/7, Update on Strategic Plan Goals – February 2024, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that there were no significant changes, in terms of the likelihood of the one and three year success indicators being met, since the previous reports to the Finance and Resources and Curriculum and Quality Committees. When the targets had been set in 2020 the longer term impact of the Covid pandemic was not known. The targets for the current year were more realistic for the environment that the College now operates in. On the whole the College had done well, with most of the comments and progress reports either neutral or positive.

In the context that the College expected an Ofsted Inspection in the next academic year, the Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee expressed concern that work around literacy is the least consistent across areas. The Principal responded that the College was in a stronger position than at the last Inspection, but that there was still some inconsistency. This area was RAG rated red because in the areas that have adopted the actions really well they are not seeing significant impact, so different actions need to be found. Governors considered whether they could help by putting this into context for students through practical storytelling, such as why literacy is important when you are an accountant, or how their careers were supported by literacy and numeracy. The Principal reported that teachers were good at contextualising literacy in classes but somebody external coming in could be helpful. Lisa Blake and Jasmin Patel said that they were willing to support this.

### 7.2. Special Focus on Goal 4 (EDI)

CIC/24/2/8, Strategic Plan – Deep Dive into Goal 4, was received and presented by the Principal. It was reported that the College was still at the early stages of its EDI journey but was now making good progress. Two days of management training for EDI was scheduled for 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> April. The Executive would then look at what to do with the wider staff body to embed the new culture in EDI throughout the organisation.

Governors asked about the diversity of the Special Interest Groups and were advised that all the groups had people on them who have protected characteristics as well as people with other interests because of the role that they have in the College. The Principal acknowledged that the groups need to be strengthened, for example there are currently no students or Governors on the groups. Students would be brought on to the groups once they are established. It was hoped that the next round of

Special Interest Group meetings, which would take place before Easter, would identify some of the things that the Groups want to work on.

Arising from the discussion a Governor shared examples of activities she had seen at another college, such as an annual trip organised by the LGBTQ+ Society to a book shop in London which featured in a film, and commented that the more exciting the activities, the greater the response from the student body. It was reported that the College had a student LGBTQ+ Group, but no students had come forward this year. A Member questioned if this was because the group was not being promoted, commenting that there was not much on the Instagram page promoting what happens in College. Using the communication channels that students use would draw more attention to what is happening. The Principal acknowledged that it had not been promoted as much this year because there had been no one in post to undertake this work. One pro-active member of staff had constantly put out things for students to engage with on the CI Connect App. Feedback from the students was that they had stopped using CI Connect because too much was being pushed at them. A Member asked if it was possible for the College to get students to do something at Essex Pride, such as have a stand. **Action:** The Principal agreed to pursue this.

A Governor commented that it would be good to get the input of the Special Interest Groups on the EDI targets before they are shared with the Board.

## 8. Risk Management

### 8.1. Corporate Risk Register – Strategic Risks

CIC/24/2/9, Corporate Risk Register last updated 22/02/24, was received and presented by the Deputy Chief Executive. It was reported that:

- The biggest two risks affecting the College currently (Level 3 Qualification reforms and the new English and maths condition of funding issue) were on the forward risk schedule, which was not included in this report. These would be included when the Audit and Risk Committee reviews the Risk Register at its meeting on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2024.
- HE provision remains high risk on the register and a new HE strategy is needed for next year. The financial contribution from HE is at an unacceptable level of around 13%. There are opportunities around Higher Technical Qualifications and Apprenticeships.
- The second highest risk (failure to meet budget forecast) is based on the risks around the types of funding and the allocations still not being received for 2024-25. The Monthly Management Report shows a level of assurance for this year.
- The risk around lack of senior management capacity would be reduced when the Risk Management Committee reviews the Risk Register at its meeting on 4<sup>th</sup> March.
- The risk around increased competition is always a factor.
- Apprenticeship income is improving month on month.

### 8.2. Corporation Board Oversight

Governors discussed the strategic risks and whether anything needed to be added to the key risks highlighted. A Part II confidential minute records this discussion.

## 9. Safeguarding

The Vice Principal: Student and Information Services provided an oral update on Safeguarding. It was reported that:

- In response to previously reported concerns that mandatory training compliance rates were below targets set by the Board, significant work was underway to improve compliance. As a result, the College was in a strong position with all mandatory topics now meeting or exceeding targets.

- Compliance rates for Level 1 Safeguarding Essentials and Level 2 Face to Face Safeguarding were at 99% against a target of 97%. Compliance rates for Responding to Sexual Violence and Harassment and Online Safety were 97% against a target of 95%.
- The Vice Principal: Student and Information Services actively follows up non compliance with Mangers, and the Face to Face safeguarding training is now embedded into staff induction.
- The Deputy Designated Lead for Safeguarding had commenced a phased return to work. Her initial key tasks include reviewing and building into College policies new central guidance including Gender Questioning (published in December); ongoing development of the mental health charter for staff and students; reviewing and redeveloping the information on the website, including resources such as Silvercloud etc.
- The College has received confirmation from the Integrated Care Board that funding for the additional counselling post has been extended to March 2025. This funding, originally for one year, provides one Counsellor for three days a week.
- The new HR Director was reviewing processes on safer recruitment and would become a Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead.
- An initial meeting with the Safeguarding Governor would take place in March.
- Current themes for student cases being dealt with by the Student Support Team include bullying and harassment and mental health. The Team was also starting to see an increase in exam anxiety concerns as we move into the final assessment and summer examination period and was looking at how they can support students in improving access to resources.

The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee recognised how much work had been involved in achieving this increase in compliance rates for mandatory training and thanked the Vice Principal and staff who had implemented this work.

#### 10. **Management Report and Accounts January 2024**

CIC/24/2/10, Management Report and Accounts January 2024, was received and presented by the Deputy Chief Executive. This was the first report in a new format which had been developed in response to a request from the Chair of the Finance and Resources Committee to provide more summary information to make the report easier to read, and was aligned with FE Commissioner sector best practice.

It was reported that the year-to-date operating deficit had moved from £447k in December to £271k in the current period. The College was still reporting a small surplus at year end in line with the budget. Apprenticeship funding was ahead of target and was forecast to be on budget, depending on withdrawals, and could improve. There were still some risks around supplies and services.

Governors welcomed the new format of the report, which they found easier to read.

#### 11. **Reports from Committees**

##### 11.1. **Curriculum and Quality Committee**

The Chair of the Curriculum and Quality Committee presented her written report (CIC/24/2/11).

##### 11.1.1. **Curriculum and Quality Update Report – January 2024**

CIC/24/2/12, Curriculum and Quality Update Report – January 2024 – update February 2024, was received and noted. The Committee Chair reported that it was a very positive report in respect of attendance and retention, particularly for 16-19. The Senior Leadership Team had put in place a range of hands-on strategies, including Heads of Departments escorting learners to some sessions, which have had a significant impact on English and maths and increased attendance rates by almost 5% on the previous year.

122 Apprentices had passed their End Point Assessment (EPA) during this year, which means the College will receive the 20% of funding for students who complete. A Governor asked if it was still the case that apprentices leave following the achieved of a qualification but before

completing the apprenticeship and was advised that this was becoming less of an issue because of changes to rules nationally. The College has been working hard on ensuring timely completions so that there is not a lag between a learner getting the qualification and then being asked to come back for the EPA, which has helped. In some Higher and Degree Apprenticeships conversations take place with the employer about recompense for money lost if the employer supports an apprentice in not doing the EPA. This is written into contracts and is starting to be exercised. The rules are changing so that a learner will not be able to get the qualification without going into the EPA. It was reported that leaving a job is the most common reason for a student leaving an apprenticeship.

The only area of concern was the gap between the attendance and predicted performance for those learners with declared difficulties and/or disabilities (about 1200 learners) and their peers. These are learners which self-declared disabilities, which could include hearing, visual, dyslexia etc.

The HE Institutional Revalidation process with the University of East Anglia was successfully achieved, subject to conditions which the senior leadership team will ensure are met in a timely fashion.

#### **11.1.2. Positive Management of Student Behaviour**

The Committee had received an oral report on a whole College approach to positive management of student behaviour. This provided Governors with confidence that the senior leaders had responded swiftly to the increase in reported incidences of poor student behaviour across the College.

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

CIC/24/2/13, Update on Progress against Quality Improvement Plan, was received and noted.

#### **11.1.4. Curriculum and Quality Committee Annual Report to the Board**

CIC/24/2/14, Curriculum and Quality Committee Annual Report to the Board 2022-23, was received and noted.

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

#### **11.2.1. Report from Committee Chair**

The Chair of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee gave an oral report on the meeting held on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024. It was reported that:

- There had been considerable discussion on succession planning. The Committee had been successful recently with a number of new appointments and want to maintain the momentum and continue to look for people interested in becoming a Governor.
- The Committee had discussed various methods for appointing student Governors but had decided it was important to retain a process where students are elected by their peers.
- It had been decided for efficiency reasons, and to support succession planning, that each Committee should have a Vice Chair. Committee Chairs were asked to think about who they might like to talk to about becoming Vice Chair of their Committee.
- The Clerk had been asked to update Skills Matrix.

#### **11.2.2. Membership Matters**

The Board received CVs for prospective Board/Co-opted members (CIC/24/2/16 and CIC/24/2/17) and on the recommendation of the Governance, Remuneration and Search Committee APPROVED the appointment of:

- Michael Asare Bediako as an Independent Member for a four year term of office with effect from 01.03.24.
- Varun Verma as a co-opted member of the Audit and Risk Committee for a four year term of office with effect from 01.03.24.

12. **Review of Effectiveness of Meeting**

Governors reviewed the effectiveness of the meeting.

13. **Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Corporation Board is on Wednesday, 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 10:00am. The meeting will be preceded by a presentation at 9.30am and followed by lunch in the Balcerne Restaurant.

14. **Any Other Urgent Business**

There were no items.