

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE
held on 28 FEBRUARY 2019

¹PRESENT T Floyd (E); E Hunter (St); T Jackson (P); S Morgan (E).

In attendance: J Chapman, Marketing Manager (mins 29 to 43)
S Grant, Deputy Principal - Corporate
C James, Assistant Principal - HE (mins 29 to 43)
J Milburn, Deputy Principal - Curriculum
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES

1. Apologies were received from S Eden and A Neal.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

2. There were no interests to be declared in matters to be discussed at this meeting.

MINUTES

3. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 1 November 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

EM3 LEP (minute 113/18)

4. The Principal reported that the EM3 LEP's newly published Strategic Economic Plan includes sections relating to skills needs for the local economy and proposed bringing a report on this to a future meeting of the Committee. The Principal also noted that his three-year term in office as the FE sector nominee on the EM3 LEP Board was due to end shortly, although he noted that it was possible for a second three-year term of office if the EM3 wished for this. The Principal is also currently a member of the recently established EM3 LEP Skills Action Group which he described as being an interesting and seemingly very effective group chaired by Barney Ely of Hays Recruitment who is also a Board member of the EM3 Board.
5. There were no other matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

CURRICULUM RECRUITMENT

6. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal – Corporate on enrolment trends for 19+ learners, to supplement information received by the Committee in November 2018 on FE, Apprenticeship and HE recruitment trends.
7. The Deputy Principal – Corporate summarised the significant changes to 19+ learners funding arrangements in recent years and the changes towards adult learners having been required to take more personal responsibility for the costs of their education. This included the introduction of a loans book arrangement where eligible 19+ learners could

¹ (C) = -opted; (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (St) = Student

- apply for a loan to fund their education and, from 2018/19, full funding for qualifying learners over 24 years old beneath the new means test threshold.
8. The Committee noted the success of College management in navigating the changes to 19+ funding policy since 2015 by counteracting the reduction in full-time learners with a significant increase in part-time learning and non-funded learning and welcomed the evidence of the College seeking to meet the skills needs of employers and individuals. It was noted that this was made possible through some investment in blended learning materials and further investment was required to increase revenue streams and to start to reduce costs. The increase in 19+ income was important particularly given funding pressures in other areas. The total number of 19+ learners in 2017-18 was c2600, generating income of c£1,440K, and both numbers and revenue are forecast to increase in 2018-19.
 9. Members sought and discussed additional information about the types of 19+ learners enrolling and why, the spread across both campuses, links between these offers and other FE provision, and the profitability of the 19+ offer.
 10. The Principal noted the importance of forging relations directly with employers in order that businesses had confidence that the colleges' learning offers were as relevant to their needs as those of private providers. The Deputy Principal – Corporate gave the examples of the launch of a range of professional courses, alongside the land-based offer, and the strategy of aligning the Andover College offer in order to shift market perception. This would be even more important if the government further reduced funding for adult learners in the future.
 11. The Committee also noted that the College was close to being awarded c£500k of LEP funding as part of a consortium led by Brooklands College, Basingstoke College and Royal Holloway University (together with other partner colleges from the 'Coast to Capital' LEP geographic area) to develop new online materials, predominantly for adult learners.
 12. Noting the use of blended learning materials, a Member questioned progress with the National Land Based College's (NLBC) plans to provide a distance-learning offer. The Principal reported products being developed by the NLBC linked to the safe use and storage of veterinary medicines, useful to all livestock keepers and relevant for vet nursing, together with another product suited to the RHS Standards and qualifications but explained that attempts to build the offer for the agri-tech sector in line with DEFRA's strategies were held up by government focus on Brexit.

LEARNER DESTINATIONS

13. The Committee had received an interim report from the Deputy Principal – Curriculum on FE student destinations for 2017-18, including emerging headlines, comparisons with DfE data for leavers July 2015 and recent cases studies of a range of learners.
14. The Committee noted that of the 64% of destinations from July 2018 which were now "known", the majority were positive (consisting of sustained further study or employment) but that there was further work to be done to seek to confirm destinations for the target of over 90% of learners.
15. The Deputy Principal – Curriculum reported that, while collection of data could be challenging because of former learners changing their contact details, there were plans for improving the system in future years.

16. The Committee also noted that the DfE data for the 2015-16 academic year, while portraying the College reasonably favourably both locally and in comparison to other land-based providers, was of limited value given that the bulk of the College's land-based data was not included.
17. The Committee welcomed the case studies, highlighting in particular examples of where learners had not succeeded well at secondary school but had been supported by the College to achieve their qualifications and progress to further study or employment. The Student Governors concurred that this was the experience of other learners she knew. It was agreed that the learner case studies be shared with the full Board for information, appended to the Committee's minutes.

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT

18. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal – Corporate providing an overview of employer engagement across three European Structural Investment Fund (ESIF) projects which the College had "contract managed" over the last 24 months on behalf of colleges within the EM3 catchment area.
19. The Committee noted that the ESIF projects had provided a positive vehicle to enable the local labour market to upgrade its skills and for the College to establish some strong partnerships with local businesses and to develop and run more courses.
20. It was recognised, however, that College management would be unlikely to be willing to host an education provision contract of this kind in the future because the inefficiency of the ESIF's audit trail processes had frustrated businesses and due to College having insufficient control of the training priorities of the other partners.
21. Asked about the financial outcome of the projects, the Deputy Principal – Corporate confirmed the contribution to the College would be c£120k this year and had been c£200k in the previous year.
22. In response to a question about the impact on the availability of the ESIF after Brexit, the Principal reported that it would be replaced with the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (SPF) which the government intended to tackle inequalities between communities by raising productivity in areas of the country that are 'furthest behind'. In the meantime, the ESIF and European Social Fund (ESF) were protected for two years.

CURRICULUM DELIVERY

23. The Committee had received the report of the Principal and Deputy Principal – Curriculum and the College's funding bid for the Taking Teaching Further programme in relation to a project to facilitate enhanced delivery of skills for the construction industry in Andover.
24. The Deputy Principal – Curriculum explained the bid for c£30k was to support the College in attracting construction industry professionals, through a range of engagement activities, to teach in specific posts where Andover College could evidence that it has failed to recruit for more than six months. This could enable more use of the facilities at Andover College, including expanding the offer to 19+ learners in the evenings.
25. The Committee welcomed the initiative and noted that, if the bid was not successful, College management would continue to explore ways to deliver the construction skills offer.

T LEVEL CONSULTATION

26. The Committee had received for information and noted the College's submission to the ESFA's T Level funding methodology consultation.
27. The Deputy Principal – Curriculum also reported that, after consideration by the SLT, the College had submitted an expression of interest to the ESFA to deliver Digital, Education and Childcare, and health and Science T Levels in 2021-22 on the basis that the College intended to be in a position to deliver these by then.
28. Asked about the curriculum planning, enrolment strategy and funding level for the T Levels, the Deputy Principal – Curriculum summarised the assessment of interest and initial estimated enrolments. The Principal reported the AOC's assessment that T Level funding was insufficient to deliver the government's expectations.

HE STRATEGY

29. The Committee had received the report of Assistant Principal – HE on HE recruitment trends and a review of the HE Strategy 2016-2020, together with a mid-term update of the Strategy to ensure it continued to reflect the direction and aspirations for HE provision at University Centre Sparsholt (UCS).
30. The Committee noted that previous reductions in HE student starts had prompted detailed operational plans for the HE and Marketing teams, with a focus on individual and team targets and the need for a systematic approach to progression planning. This had seen a positive trend during the current recruitment cycle so far in relation to external applicants. A number of internal FE students, particularly in one faculty (Animal Management), had not yet made progression choices and the College was supporting them with additional IAG from an external careers consultant.
31. In response to the reported approach to communicating with applicants, the Student Governor shared her and some of her friends' experiences of communications from HE providers sometimes being seen as too frequent or not relevant to the individual's stage in the application process and the Assistant Principal – HE agreed that some caution was needed to find the right balance.
32. The Marketing Manager highlighted the value of using real examples of employment outcomes and the Student Governor agreed that, in selecting an HE provider, she had prioritised links to businesses and evidence of employment outcomes and noted that students were looking for value for money from their HE fees.
33. The Assistant Principal – HE reported that the TEF Gold award had been central to much of the UCS promotion and that it was unclear what the impact of the current review of the TEF would be on its structure and relevance to UCS's provision in the future.
34. The Committee noted that there were further potential risks around the outcome of the Augur review and possible changes to future fee and funding arrangements.
35. In relation to the HE Strategy more broadly, the Assistant Principal – HE noted the enormous change experienced in the HE sector since the strategy was produced and highlighted the key areas of the strategy which had been updated.
36. Members discussed plans in relation to future development of the HE curriculum, with potential new degree offers in animal welfare and agriculture, subject to the investment in new animal welfare facilities, and new HNCs at Andover College. All were subject to further assessment of viability and to validation processes. It was noted that HE at

Andover College tended to respond to the needs of the local community and therefore availability of residential accommodation was not an issue.

37. The Assistant Principal – HE stressed the importance of increasing the differentiation of FE and HE facilities and support resources on both campuses, in addition to the existing specialist facilities in areas such as fish and equine and the HE study centre. At Sparsholt College, the priority was an HE specific teaching block and Members discussed options for funding this, given the College’s current tight financial constraints. The Principal reminded members of the discussion on this point which had occurred at the Governors’ Seminar and commented that he was planning to take forward the ideas which had been discussed in relation to capital funds.
38. The Committee welcomed the updated HE Strategy and noted that a new strategy was planned to be presented to the Committee in the Autumn for implementation in 2020-2024.

MARKETING

39. The Committee had received the progress report of the Principal and Marketing Manager on the delivery of the Marketing Strategy for 2018-19, including a RAG rating update on each of the strategic priorities and related activities.
40. The Marketing Manager summarised progress against each of the four quadrants, as well as in relation to “Whole College” themes. There was an emphasis on more collegiate working across the College to support marketing objectives, with a more agile approach to activities such as Interview and Applicant days. There was also a more personalised approach to direct communications with applicants.
41. Asked how the Marketing team kept abreast of developments in digital communication, the Marketing Manager explained that the College worked with a knowledgeable website partner and brought in digital expertise where needed to supplement internal resources.
42. The Principal noted the update on the Sparsholt Futures STEM/digital event for Year 8/9 school pupils, with over 900 pupils due to attend and positive progress in engaging industry contacts and developing the content for the event.
43. The Committee noted that the Marketing Strategy appeared to be being implemented effectively, with outcomes such as an increase in FE and HE applications suggesting that the strategy was having a positive impact on the image and reputation of the College and UCS.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

44. The Committee noted the most recent Healthcheck report (2019/02) and that there were no matters relevant to its remit which had not been covered elsewhere in the meeting.

RISK MANAGEMENT

45. The Committee Chair reminded Members of the Committee’s responsibility to contribute to the Board’s oversight of risk management by having in mind relevant summative and sub-risks from the College’s risk register when reviewing management reports.
46. It was noted that a number of areas of potential risk had been covered during the discussions and would be reported to the Board via the Committee’s minutes.
47. The meeting ended at 12.15 pm.