

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE
held on 15 MAY 2018

¹PRESENT S Eden (C); T Jackson (P) (until min 76); S Morgan (E); A Neal (E); S Ward (E).

In attendance: J Chapman, Marketing Manager (mins 64 to 70)
T Floyd, Governor
C James, Dean of Higher Education (mins 77 to 85)
M Simmons, Deputy Principal
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES

47. Apologies were received from C Duffy.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

MINUTES

49. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 22 February 2018 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

Enrolments (minute 4/18)

50. The Principal reported there was no further update since his report to the March meeting of the Board of Governors that Landex was aware of the request to collect comparative data on enrolments in land-based courses and that no timetable had yet been set.

FE Learner Destinations (minutes 10 & 13/18)

51. The Deputy Principal noted that further developments to the analysis of the data would be reported in the following year's annual FE Learner Destinations report.

T Levels (minute 39/18)

52. The Principal explained that, since the last meeting of the Committee, more was known about the future of Tech Levels and Applied Generals and that this was covered in the Curriculum Plan report.

CURRICULUM PLAN

53. The Committee had received the report of the Deputy Principal on the Curriculum Plan for 2018-19 to 2020-21 which set out the direction of the curriculum over three years for 16-18 year olds, 19+ adult skills, apprenticeships and HE.

54. The Deputy Principal introduced the report, explaining that it built on discussions at the recent Governors' Seminar of the developing education policy landscape and the analysis of recruitment which had been presented at the November meeting of the Committee.

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

55. In particular, the Deputy Principal highlighted the key changes around the new technical qualifications which had been introduced this year with new methodology and exam based assessment.
56. The Committee noted that the strategy for the curriculum continued to maintain a strong land-based offer at FE and HE at Sparsholt and broad Tertiary offer at Andover. It was also noted that management would continue to regularly review all areas of decline and to ascertain whether additional resources would regenerate interest and to balance this with investment in areas which had a track record of strong recruitment and student interest.
57. During the Committee's discussion, Members sought and received further information and clarifications in a number of areas, including in relation to developments in the market and student and employer needs in relation to horticulture and grounds/landscape opportunities. Asked about the relationship between apprenticeships and FE numbers, the Deputy Principal explained that they had separate funding streams but having horticulture apprenticeships helped to enable keeping facilities for FE courses.
58. In relation to the curriculum provision at Andover College, the Committee discussed the potential education and employment skills needs of military families and ex service personnel moving into the Andover area. The Deputy Principal also reported that management were revisiting the previous decision not to offer the new digital T-level on the basis that there would be time to prepare before the T-level launched in 2020 and it was recognised that there might otherwise be a skills gap in the curriculum offer in the future. This would require confirmation from the Department for Education that the College could register retrospectively.
59. Asked about the College's approach to online training, the Deputy Principal explained that there was an aspiration for blended learning across areas of the curriculum but that there was not currently the substantial pre-investment required to develop this. However, the College continued to work with the National Land Based College to develop an offer of blended continued professional development training for the sector.
60. Turning to Higher Education (HE), the Deputy Principal highlighted the challenges in recruitment, where numbers were declining in most areas against strong competition and uncertainty in the sector about fees and student loans. University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) was seeking to refresh the HE offer and to make HE pathways more visible to the wider student community. This would include new approaches to promoting the leading offer in zoo animal management, for example.
61. Asked if the changing education policy and funding environment would provide future opportunities to reshape the curriculum offer, the Principal and Deputy Principal reported discussions with the agri-tech/food industry and with animal management related bodies but noted the challenge in finding industry partners to invest in the College.
62. While welcoming the drive to find external partnerships, Members expressed the need to ensure that any relationship with partners is focused appropriately (on best practice rather than politicised issues for example).
63. **Resolved** – that the scope and ambition of the Curriculum Plan for 2018-19 to 2020-21 be endorsed and reported to the Board of Governors as a fit-for-purpose working document to deliver the College's strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to student progression,

future employability, professional development of the employed and the needs of employers.

MARKETING

64. The Committee had received the report of the Principal and Marketing Manager updating on the delivery of the annual Marketing Plan 2017-18 and in-year Marketing Metrics.
65. The Principal reported that the Marketing Team was working well, with good progress on actions within the Marketing Plan for 2017/18 and positive indicators of enrolments in 16-18 and 19+ FE on both campuses. Looking ahead, there was a continuing emphasis on conversion through an improved student journey from application to enrolment and a focus on bolstering school liaison, particularly at 6th forms.
66. Responding to a Member's question as to how information about student employment was used in marketing, the Marketing Manager described how real student destinations were used. Potentially more could also be done to develop marketing collateral with former students and employers, including with social media and video clips and the team were considering more parent focused marketing through use of data. The Committee also discussed developing a "value by employers" proposition, supported by feedback and quotations from employers.
67. Asked about the significance of the College's facilities and infrastructure to prospective parents and students, the Marketing Manager reported qualitative feedback that, while new buildings could create interest, it was the impact of speaking to teaching staff about their personalised approach and industry experience at open days which made the most impact.
68. The Principal reported that the College was reviewing the impact and role of Countryside Day and considering alternative events more specifically targeted at secondary school aged children.
69. In response to some reservations expressed by Members about the potential loss of the wider community relations and reputation building benefits of Countryside Day, the Principal explained that the College needed to carefully consider the best strategic use of staff resources to maximise the impact on recruitment while still maintaining a presence with the wider community. Other events, such as Bunny & Chick Easter Weekend and Open Farm Sunday for Garstons Farm also provided opportunities for the general public to visit Sparsholt College and the Women into Digital event at Andover College had been very successful in involving industry, alongside local school children.
70. The Committee noted the report and asked the Principal to keep the Board informed about plans in relation to Countryside Day.

STRATEGIC PLAN

71. The Committee had received the draft objectives and annual milestones under Priorities 1 and 4 in the College's Strategic Plan 2018-21, including a number of Objectives and Annual Milestones which were particularly relevant to the Committee's terms of reference.
72. The Principal explained that the draft objectives and annual milestones would be further updated prior to submission to the Board and that, while Objectives 1-6 more directly related to the remit of the Quality & Standards Committee, some of the Annual Milestones referenced areas on which the Curriculum, Employers & Market

Requirements Committee advised the Board and therefore had been shared with the Committee for comment.

73. A Member noted that the majority of the key measures were qualitative, rather than quantitative, other than in areas such as student numbers and income.
74. The Principal noted that the enrolment and income figures would be finalised as part of the annual budget setting process and for the ESFA two-year financial plan.
75. Asked about the approach to monitoring objective 14 (training services for employers), the Principal noted that marketing activity to employers was reported through the Marketing Plan updates to the Committee and that more detail would also be provided in a report to CEMR on progress with the Employer Engagement Strategy.
76. **Resolved** – that the Objectives 1-6 and 13-16 and related annual milestones under Priorities 1 and 4 of the College’s Strategic Plan 2017-20 be recommended to the Board of Governors.

HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENT DESTINATIONS

77. The Committee had received the report of the Dean of Higher Education (HE) on the College’s annual collection of the destinations data of HE students who left University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) in July 2017, commissioned as part of the Destination of Learners leaving Higher Education (DLHE) funding requirement.
78. The Committee noted that there was a mixed picture in terms of employment and that, while a sizeable number of graduates were in relevant employment, more than half of leavers reported that they did not need their qualification to get their job. However, a very high percentage reported that their degree programme had prepared them well, or very well, for progressing to employment or further study.
79. A Member stressed the continuing need of employers in the land-based sector for graduates with practical and work placement experience. While practical experience was an important element of HE, the HE students’ destinations data might also reflect the fact that graduates in the land-based sector tended to need to build further experience at lower levels before taking on positions of higher responsibility and pay. The Dean of HE agreed and noted that this had been reflected in the UCS’s TEF submission.
80. Asked about why, although still a positive score compared to the sector, the Net Promotor Score was lower than the previous year, the Dean of HE explained that the previous year may have been exceptional but that it was hoped the reduction could be better understood when the qualitative data was available.
81. Responding to a Member’s question about the data on progression to further study, the Dean of HE explained that only two of the Foundation students had not chosen to top-up at UCS and that the other examples of students progressing elsewhere were in subject areas which were not offered at a higher level by UCS.
82. The Committee endorsed the approach taken by College management to improve the collection and analysis of destinations information for HE leavers in order to assist the College in monitoring student progression and employability.
83. The Dean of HE explained that, under the new Office for Students (OfS) regulatory framework, the College would be required to use a supplier nominated by the OfS and that the data collection point would be 18 months, rather than 6 months, after graduation. This might present further challenges in achieving the minimum response

rates. It was also noted that there had been suggestions that graduate earnings might be used as a factor in setting the level of fees that HE institutions would be eligible to charge in the future.

84. The Committee agreed that the new data collection requirements presented a potential risk to the College. Asked if there would be value in UCS continuing to survey graduates on employment for its own monitoring purposes, the Dean of HE agreed that it could be worthwhile continuing to collect high level and qualitative data and noted that UCS would also like to set up alumni groups, subject to resources, to maintain an ongoing relationship with graduates.
85. The Committee also discussed the marketing plans for HE and trend for HE applications with the Dean of HE noting that, while progress had been made in more targeted marketing, there was more to be done and that some additional external marketing resource had been contracted. The Dean of HE explained that UCS also needed to refresh the offer in some places and to invest in HE specific facilities to be able to differentiate the HE student experience at the recruitment point.

INFORMATION, ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

86. The Deputy Principal gave an oral report on the assessment by Matrix of the College's Information, Advice and Guidance (IAG) at all points of the student journey.
87. The written report from Matrix was expected shortly and would be circulated to Committee Members outside the meeting and the Deputy Principal confirmed that the College was expected to retain its Matrix standard accreditation and had received very positive feedback from the assessor, with two points of development. In particular, the Deputy Principal had welcomed the feedback that the standard of IAG was the same on both campuses, which provided a validation of the efforts made by management to develop a common culture and approach across Sparsholt College and Andover College.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

88. The Committee noted the most recent Healthcheck report (2018/03) and that there were no matters relevant to its remit which had not been covered elsewhere in the meeting.

PERFORMANCE OF THE COMMITTEE

89. The Committee had received the report of the Clerk which posed a series of questions to prompt members in discussing the Committee's performance over 2017-18 and to review the Committee's terms of reference.
90. In discussion, Committee Members agreed that the remit of the Committee continued to be highly relevant, particularly given the continuing developments and uncertainty in the education policy and funding environment. Members noted that the Committee had been well supported by the information and data reported by management and had engaged with management in some challenging discussions on the matters within its remit.
91. A Member noted the value in the range of skills and experience that the current Board Members and Co-opted Member brought to the Committee.
92. Noting that the Committee rarely made formal recommendations for decision to the Board, Members agreed that this reflected the Committee's terms of reference and that in scrutinising management's plans, the Committee was able to advise the Board, to highlight areas of risk and to make recommendations for action if appropriate.

93. The Committee reviewed its terms of reference, in particular the approach to advising the Board on how the College curriculum meets the needs of students, current employees and employers.
94. Members discussed the role of the Employer Engagement strategy and Three Year Curriculum plan in reporting how the College addressed the needs of stakeholders at a strategic level. The Curriculum Plan also updated the Committee on changes to policy.
95. The Deputy Principal noted that the Employer Engagement report enabled the Committee to understand how well areas of the College engage with their sector and facilitate work experience and agreed that there might be a case for closer examination of different College areas in turn.
96. Members noted that the Committee did not monitor how teaching of the curriculum met employers' needs as this tended to come under the remit of the annual Self-Assessment Report to the Quality & Standards Committee or was established by the required content of the qualifications.
97. Members also discussed the Committee's remit to understand the College's impact in terms of economic and public value, noting that this was difficult to quantify, although recognising that economic and public value were part of the context of much of the reporting to the Committee.
98. The Committee also discussed the inevitable tension which existed between the Committee considering matters at a strategic level, appropriate to the governance remit of the Board of Governors, and seeking to understand the underlying operational detail of management's decisions and plans in order to make an informed assessment.
99. The Committee Chair noted that it was last meeting of the Deputy Principal, prior to his retirement from the College, and thanked M Simmons for his significant contribution to the work of the Committee since its inception. The Committee highlighted the importance of passing on the Deputy Principal's knowledge, in particular in relation to the curriculum, to his successor.
100. The meeting ended at 1.00 pm.