

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF GOVERNORS
held on 14 May 2020 at 4.00 pm
via videoconference

¹PRESENT: Z Carter (E); J Emm (SCS); T Floyd (E); N Hopkins (E); T Jackson (P); J Lander (E); M Lauder (E); N Moody (E); S Morgan (E); A Neal (E); A Owen (E); J Porter (St); R Palmer (E); H Perry (S); C Wilson (E).

In attendance: S Grant, Deputy Principal - Corporate
J Milburn, Deputy Principal – Curriculum & Principal Designate
A Whitworth, Director of Finance
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES AND MEMBERSHIP

154. Apologies were received from J Blaber.
155. The Chair noted that it was J Porter’s last Board of Governors meeting before she completed her final academic year at Andover College and thanked her for her contribution to the Board.
156. The Chair welcomed J Lander and N Moody to their first meeting since their appointments to the Board.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

157. There were no new interests to declare. The Board’s Register of Interests records Members who hold (unremunerated) directorships of the College’s subsidiary companies.

FINANCE

158. The Board had received the latest College Group management accounts (to 13 March 2020) and latest Healthcheck report, together with a joint letter from the AOC and Landex to the Department for Education (DfE) in relation to the financial impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on land-based colleges. This followed an interim update report to the Resources Committee (via email on 22 April) from the Director of Finance on the College’s cash position and lending banks loan covenants.
159. The Director of Finance highlighted key points in the management accounts, which included a summary of variances against budget, primarily as a result of the impact of Covid-19. The 2019-20 forecast had deteriorated from a budget surplus to a deficit of c£750k as a result. The Director of Finance explained that this was a cautious forecast and it was hoped there would be incremental improvements. It was not therefore anticipated that the banks covenants would be breached for 2019-20.

¹ (E) = External; (P) = Principal; (S) = Staff; (SCS) = Sparsholt College Services Staff Governor; (St) = Student

160. The Board noted that the cashflow for the College and cash position remained healthy and the Director of Finance confirmed that she was not concerned about the College's ability to trade.
161. The Principal conveyed caution about the risk of continuing negative impact on the College's finances should restrictions such as social distancing remain in 2020-21, illustrating the increase in student transport bus costs if the numbers of students each coach was able to carry was reduced. The Principal also noted a range of other uncertainties, including the potential impact on HE enrolments if students chose to defer and the continuing loss of income from letting of facilities.
162. The Board noted the role of Landex in seeking to explain to the DfE the disproportionate financial impact of the pandemic on land-based colleges due to the significant loss of income and considerable increased costs. It was not known if financial recompense would be made available and, if so, at what level or for how long and therefore this had not been allowed for in the forecasts.
163. Members welcomed the clarity of the management accounts and the close and cautious monitoring by the Director of Finance and SLT of the financial impact of Covid-19. Asked about a reforecast for 2020-21, the Director of Finance confirmed that a 2020-21 budget and 2021-22 forecast would be presented to the next meeting of the Resources Committee.
164. Questioned by a Member as to whether a range of financial scenarios were being tested, the Principal reported that consideration was being given to analysis of different scenarios and/or extended sensitivity analysis and this would be reported to the Resources Committee.

CURRICULUM, QUALITY & STUDENT EXPERIENCE

165. The Deputy Principal Curriculum and Deputy Principal Corporate provided a verbal report on developments to the management of delivery of the FE and HE curriculum, quality performance and safeguarding learners as a result of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, with reference to the Healthcheck report. The Board had also received for background information correspondence from the DfE and Hampshire County Council.
166. The Deputy Principal Curriculum summarised key elements of the transfer of the FE provision from face-to-face learning to virtual learning from 23 March, noting that either live or recorded sessions were being provided in line with the curriculum timetables. Student attendance was generally very good and the teams were working to support students who needed more help to engage. There was some drop off as students were aware that work after 20 March would not form part of the evidence for predicted grades. LSA, pastoral, careers guidance and wellbeing support had continued and included weekly risk assessments of vulnerable learners and liaison with HCC regarding ECHPs.
167. Asked about the provision of careers guidance for students completing their enrolments this year and bridging activities Year 11s, the Deputy Principal Curriculum confirmed that careers guidance had continued to be provided and that information had been shared with schools and students.
168. The Deputy Principal Curriculum also summarised the latest position regarding setting of grades, in place of examinations, noting that City & Guilds was still considering the

- approach to technical qualifications such as bricklaying and carpentry. It was expected that some completion of practicals would still be required.
169. Responding to Members questions about what guidance was being provided to staff and how staff felt about the responsibility placed on them to confirm grades, the Deputy Principal Curriculum explained that communications had been issued to staff, students and parents about the processes. In several areas, final assessments had already taken place before lockdown. In others, a range of evidence and systems would be used. Although some staff might be apprehensive, they accepted this was a national requirement and support was being provided by management and the Head of Quality & Learning.
170. The Board noted the latest DfE guidance that schools and colleges would be expected to provide some face-to-face learning to Year 10 and 12 students from 1 June, with the expectation that first year A Level students at Andover College would be in scope together with some vocational students. The DfE guidance did not require a return to a full face-to-face timetable but some face-to-face sessions to support remote learning. The College would be required to undertake a detailed risk assessment and take into account in its planning mitigations such as not requiring students travel on public transport during peak times.
171. The Deputy Principal Curriculum reported that planning had begun and was being extended to involving all managers, giving examples of the approach being taken to limiting the numbers of students present at one time and the hours which individual members of staff would be required to be on campus. Once the initial plans were further developed, staff would be consulted before plans were finalised. The Board was being asked to endorse the partial opening of the College to students, in line with DfE guidance, with detailed risk assessments to follow.
172. Asked by the Student Governor about the approach to staff who were shielding or had other health risks, the Principal explained that it was recognised some staff had health considerations and childcare constraints, and that this was being taken into account. The academic Staff Governor reported that several of her team had raised concerns about return to campus from 1 June and made a specific suggestion for areas of learning which worked less well online.
173. Members reflected on several points in discussion, including approaches by other organisations to a phased resumption of activity and the recognition that the developing Covid-19 situation could also lead to constraints being relaxed and then subsequently reintroduced at intervals. Members also suggested that there might be opportunities for a ‘new normal’ with different working practices, changes to property usage and blended learning.
174. **Resolved** – that the College should follow Government guidance to supplement the remote education of students with some face-to-face support for Year 12 students from 1 June, wherever practicable, providing that College management was satisfied by carrying out comprehensive risk assessments that the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students had been appropriately considered and that the College’s headline risk assessment was provided to the Chair of Governors in order to confirm that the risk assessment process had been undertaken prior to the partial reopening of the College campuses.

175. The Deputy Principal Corporate provided an update on apprenticeships and HE, noting that around three quarters of the apprentices had been furloughed by employers and five made redundant. There would also be negative financial impact if the College could not bring in new starters.
176. In terms of HE, it was noted that the curriculum was being successfully delivered remotely, with attendance averaging 85-88%. Final year vivas had been undertaken online, with all students attending their viva. Study and wellbeing support was also continuing to be provided. HE grade assessments would be undertaken in line with the University of Portsmouth's 'no detriment' policy, with each student assessed via three methods and given the best available outcome. The exception was Vet Nursing where the RCVS required assessments to be undertaken under exam conditions with virtual invigilation. Guidance was waited as to the final assessments with a concern that this does not delay new entrants to employment.
177. The Deputy Principal Corporate also provided an update on HE recruitment, noting that there were 31 fewer applicants than at the same point the previous year and 90 applicants still to decide (compared to 50 the previous year).
178. Asked whether moving the start of term would be likely to have an impact on applications, the Deputy Principal Corporate reported that this had been debated at the HE Strategy group and it was thought that there would be a mixed response but that the University Centre Sparsholt needed to counteract messages appearing from the sector about late or limited provision in the Autumn term.

GOVERNANCE

Office for Students

179. The Board had received a briefing for information on the introduction by the Office for Students (OfS) of a new condition of registration (E6) in relation to integrity and stability of the sector, emerging from concerns about the impact of Covid-19 on HE providers.
180. The Deputy Principal Corporate set out key elements of the condition, noting that it was being applied retrospectively and was likely to be extended beyond its initial one year time frame. The Deputy Principal Corporate reassured the Board that University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) complied with the condition, noting in particular that UCS did not make unconditional offers unless the student applying had already met the grades, nor did it offer prospective students financial incentives. The Deputy Principal Corporate also confirmed that the UCS only amended entry criteria in the event where there were changes to the course which justified this and not in order to lower the entry standards.

Chair of Governor Approvals

181. The Board noted the summary of matters approved by the Chair of Governors since the April meeting of the Board:
 - a) the final version of the FE Student Fees and Bursaries Policy;
 - b) the eSafety and Online Communications Policy (Student Version);
 - c) the use of the Sparsholt College campus by the military for a short-term COVID-19 Mobile Testing Unit (MTU) subject to the SLT being satisfied that the arrangements

would not interfere with the college’s core education purpose and that suitable safeguards had been agreed with the MoD, in particular in relation to health and safety.

182. Asked about the impact of the MTU, the Principal reported that it seemed to be working efficiently and was not causing disruption to the College. The Deputy Principal Corporate confirmed that the College had not received a request for the MTU to return beyond the current week and there was no risk of it being present if and when students returned to the Sparsholt College campus.

College President and Vice President

183. The Principal reported the retirement of the College Vice President, Lord Malmesbury, in February and that the College President had agreed to further extend his final term of office until 23 October following the postponement of the College’s HE graduation ceremony and the invitation of the Principal Designate to the retiring Principal to give an address at the ceremony.
184. **Resolved** – that the term of office of the College President, Lord Selborne, be extended to 23 October 2020.
185. The Board recorded its immense gratitude to both Lord Selborne and Lord Malmesbury for their long-standing support of the College.

College Common Seal

186. The Board had received the report of the Clerk to the Corporation proposing revisions to the Standing Orders in relation to authenticating use of the College’s Common Seal.
187. The Board noted that the Board’s Standing Orders required the seal to be authenticated by the signature of the Chair or Vice Chair and by one other governor, which in practice is usually the Principal, and that it was proposed to enable any other external governor to sign in place of the Chair, recognising that the Chair or Vice Chair might not be available, particularly during the current pandemic. The Clerk explained that the revised wording should exclude the SCS Staff Governor (who is technically an ‘external governor’ but does not have the same level of independence, being employed by the College Group).
188. A member proposed that a time limit for the revision be defined and the Board agreed that the procedures be reviewed after a year.
189. **Resolved** – that the Standing Orders be amended to require that *‘The application of the seal shall be authenticated by the signature of the Chair or, in his/her absence, another external governor (excluding the governor employed by a College subsidiary) together with that of any other governor’* and that this revision be reviewed and reported to the Board in July 2021.
190. In relation to changes to the operation of the Board more broadly in response to the Covid-19 pandemic, a member welcomed the circulation of staff newsletters and other updates and advocated the Board continuing to receive and discuss updates from management as plans developed.
191. The meeting closed at 5.00 pm.