

SPARSHOLT COLLEGE HAMPSHIRE
MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
CURRICULUM, EMPLOYERS & MARKET REQUIREMENTS COMMITTEE
held on 22 OCTOBER 2020
via videoconference

PRESENT S Duckering (C); T Floyd (E) (Chair); J Milburn (P); N Moody (E); S Morgan (E)

In attendance: J Baker, Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt College)
J Chapman, Marketing Manager (mins 124 to 141)
S Grant, Deputy Principal Corporate
S Hermiston, Director of Information & Funding (to minutes 133)
C James, Assistant Principal HE (to minute 133)
B Stokes, Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover College)
S Willson, Clerk to the Corporation

APOLOGIES

96. Apologies were received from M Serridge.

DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

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

MINUTES

98. **Resolved** – that the minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2020 be confirmed and signed as a correct record.

MATTERS ARISING

Curriculum plan – industry work placements (minute 85)

99. The Deputy Principal Corporate briefed the committee on the significant challenges which the Covid-19 pandemic had created for colleges to meet their funding targets for industry work placements because of the number of employees who were unable due to the impact on their business of the pandemic or for safety reasons to accept students on work placements. Colleges had lobbied the ESFA to explain the difficulties and to highlight the inconsistency between having student ‘bubbles’ in place at college and for students to then be entering different workplaces. The ESFA had acknowledged these concerns and reported that the situation was being monitored. The Deputy Principal Corporate explained that the college currently had a contractual obligation to deliver industry work placements for c350 students and, despite good progress with the numbers completing their placements and every effort being made, it appeared likely that the full target would not be met. Consultation with other land-based colleges, suggested that the college was comparatively in a better position than some.

100. The committee noted that the management had made the ESFA aware of the position and had sought confirmation that there would not be funding claw back. The committee agreed to draw the attention of the Board to the fact that, until the ESFA confirmed a

change in policy, this remained a potential area of risk and that the college continued to work to support students to undertake their industrial work placements. The Principal confirmed that the AOC was also pressing government to resolve the current unsatisfactory position for colleges.

Committee terms of reference (minute 103)

101. It was noted that revised terms of reference had been approved by the Board of Governors in July. The membership of the committee continued to include one student governor, with the other two student governors invited to attend meetings.
102. There were no other matters arising not covered by items on the agenda.

COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLAN

103. The committee had received the report of the Clerk setting out the Committee's forward business plan for 2020-21.
104. As part of the plan, consideration of the curriculum plan had been brought forward from the summer term to the Spring term as part of changes to how curriculum planning took place within the areas of learning. The Deputy Principal Corporate confirmed that the annual curriculum contribution analysis report, received by the committee and by the Resources Committee, would also be brought forward to the Spring term. To enable more time for discussion at this meeting of the reports, it was agreed to move the careers strategy progress report to the Summer term which would also fit with timing of the outcome of the next scheduled Matrix accreditation (due May).
105. The committee noted that the college's curriculum planning processes had been the subject of a recent internal advisory audit and that the resulting report would be considered at the November meeting of the Audit Committee. A draft of the report had been shared with the Committee Chair. The Principal reported that, while the auditors had outlined how the college's processes differed from those at other colleges, this was understood to be because of the nature of the curriculum offer and complexity of funding streams. The auditors were content that the planning process was financially sound and aligned with the marketing strategy. If there were any actions emerging from discussion of the final report at the Audit Committee, these would be reported at the next meeting of the committee.
106. The Committee Chair observed that the committee's role was to be satisfied that the curriculum planning process and the three year plan, particularly in relation to years two and three, supported delivery of the College's strategic ambitions, particularly in relation to student progression, future employability, professional development of the employed and to meeting the needs of employees.
107. **Resolved** – that the committee's annual business plan for 2020-21 be approved with the amendments that the contribution analysis report be presented in the Spring term and the careers strategy progress report be presented in the Summer term.

CURRICULUM RECRUITMENT

108. The committee had received the report of the Director of Information and Funding on enrolment trends across Further Education, Apprenticeships and Higher Education.
109. The committee considered the analysis in relation to College's curriculum offer and strategic aims, discussing the recruitment strengths and weaknesses relative to the four

previous years and taking into account the impact of demographic trends, the Covid-19 pandemic and funding policy for adult (19+) learners.

110. The committee welcomed the projected 22% increase in new full-time first year HE students, despite a reduction of 15% in applications, and the actions which had been undertaken to support this. It was noted that there had been a substantial increase in the number of the College's FE cohort progressing to HE at University Centre Sparsholt (UCS).
111. Responding to a member's question as to the level of risk for HE student withdrawals given the higher A Level grades achieved nationally in 2019-20, the Deputy Principal Corporate recognised that this was a concern in the sector but considered that the risk at University Centre Sparsholt (UCS) was low due to the mitigations put in place, such as early assessment to ensure individuals' had the capability to undertake the course, a pre-study course for new students offered over the summer and resource from the Access and Participation Plan budget to provide extra study support. The Dean of Higher Education added that the emphasis had been on ensuring basic academic skills were in place and that the new classroom online videoconferencing technology was facilitating a high-level of student attendance and engagement, both face-to-face and remotely.
112. The Deputy Principal Corporate also reported that UCS had sought to comply with consumer protection law by communicating clearly with students in good time the planned arrangements for learning, including a commitment to provide access to remote learning where students could not, or preferred not to, attend face-to-face sessions.
113. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) noted that similar risks had been anticipated in relation to new FE students and measures taken to enable changes of course, if needed, and to support achievement and progression in the long term. This included monitoring barriers associated with student withdrawal to provide individualised intervention and support and small group tuition for English and maths or 'catch-up' where needed.
114. The Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) explained that the college was confident about the prior achievement level of progressing FE students on the Sparsholt campus and had also started working with these students last term to prepare them for their new courses. This had allowed time this term to focus on early assessment and support for students who were new to the College and those taking English and maths.
115. Committee members sought additional information about aspects of the analysis summarised in the report.
116. A member, who was himself a farmer, noted the positive enrolments of students for new HE Agriculture offer and sought further information about the proportion of Foundation students. (The member also noted for the information of the committee that he was supporting the HE Agriculture offer in building links to local industry allied to the agriculture sector and receiving visits from students to his farm.)
117. The Dean of Higher Education explained that the majority (65-70%) of all UCS students initially enrolled on a Foundation degree and that this gave students more flexibility, depending on the students' own and industry's requirements. Around 75% of these students subsequently transferred to a BSc at UCS, some topped up elsewhere.
118. Asked by the Committee Chair about the factors underlying the decline this year in A Level recruitment at Andover College, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Andover) explained that there were a range of reasons, including competition from other sixth form colleges.

The College was gathering information from local schools about their GCSE student destinations to build on the analysis from previous years and inform future engagement. Members recognised the challenges and commended the hard work that the teams had undertaken to build the profile of Andover Sixth and to establish positive relationships with the schools.

119. Responding to a member's query as to whether the increase in FE enrolments was a result of some learners opting for a full-time course rather than an apprenticeship due to the pandemic, the Deputy Principal Corporate confirmed that this was likely to be a factor and that it might be that some learners would convert to apprenticeships at a later point.
120. Asked about the timing of an apprenticeship start, the Deputy Principal Corporate explained that the timing for some apprenticeships was affected by the timescale for new apprenticeship standards being confirmed and recognised this could be a barrier with some for employers.
121. The committee discussed the decline in FE enrolments for Sport given the increase year on year in other areas of FE at Sparsholt College. The Deputy Principal Corporate reported that she had conducted research to understand the decline and that it was directly linked to the pandemic: students had elected to enrol at colleges close to their homes to avoid travel even if that was at the expense of a more wide ranging experience at the college. Animal Management had seen a small decline for similar reasons. The Principal added that the football focused sports BTEC had also seen a national decline in recruitment linked to concerns that there would be less match play by lower leagues due to the pandemic.
122. Asked about the increase in Horticulture student enrolments, the Vice Principal Curriculum (Sparsholt) explained that there was a history of variability in Horticulture numbers depending in part on general interest in the subject at a given time. This year's increase also had to be seen in the context of previous declines in this area and actions taken by the College to bring in new lecturers and improve progression opportunities. There might also have been a gain to FE numbers from fewer apprenticeship starts.
123. The Committee Chair reflected on the technological and environmental developments in motor vehicles and farm vehicles and how the College would respond to, for examples, skills requirements in relation to electric vehicles. The Principal explained that motor vehicle qualification programmes had started being adapted to take this into account.
124. The Committee Chair concluded the discussion by commending management for the recruitment and enrolment analysis and the further actions which had been outlined, and acknowledged the excellent achievement of increasing enrolments, particularly in light of the pandemic.

HIGHER EDUCATION ACCESS AND PARTICIPATION

125. The committee had received the termly report of the Deputy Principal Corporate and Dean of Higher Education on progress with delivery of the Access and Participation Plan (APP) 2020-21 to 2024-25.
126. The committee noted that the monitoring report to the Office for Students (OfS) in relation to the 2019-20 Office for Fair Access (OFFA) agreement was due to be submitted in the Spring term and that the OfS had removed the requirement to report against historic targets. The OfS had also indicated that, as a result of difficulties encountered in the delivery of access activities during the lockdown, it would be permissible to reallocate

some of the expenditure originally agreed for access activities to supporting students for retention and success.

127. The Dean of HE corrected the 2024/25 target figures in Table 1 of the report due to an administrative error.
128. The committee noted that good progress had been made to date on meeting the 2020-21 APP targets and all targets were expected to be met other than in relation to sufficiently increasing the recruitment of males from under-represented (POLAR4 Q1) backgrounds. This would require explanation and an action plan for closing the gap.
129. The Dean of HE highlighted the positive results from the personalised approach to converting applications to enrolments, which had enabled the year on year increase in total HE enrolments, and noted that work had begun on access activities targeted at certain schools but that this had been interrupted by lockdown.
130. The Dean of HE also noted the support system in place for students with disabilities from open days onwards. Responding to the Committee Chair's question as to types of disability, the Dean of HE explained that analysis was being undertaken and would report to the next committee meeting but that the majority of the disabilities appeared to be in relation to mental health. 31% of students enrolled in 2020-21 had declared a disability which far exceeded the APP target and raised some challenges in relation to the ongoing support required for retention and achievement, particular given the process for students accessing external Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) funded mental health support via agencies.
131. It was noted that there was an increase in students reports mental health disabilities in the sector generally, in part potentially reflecting more willingness to declare and better reporting but also requiring more interventions and support.
132. In terms of the success targets, good progress had been achieved in reducing the difference in non-continuation rates between all students and those with a disability and attainment rates between POLAR4 Q1 and Q5. However, more was needed to prevent an increase of the different in non-continuation rates between IMD Q1/Q2 and IMD Q3/Q4/Q5.
133. The Deputy Principal Corporate reported that the number of HE students qualifying for means-tested bursaries had increased significantly this year, from around 40 to nearly 200 and that management would be seeking agreement at the Resources Committee and Board to increasing the funding of bursaries, recognising that HE income was slightly higher than budgeted.
134. The Dean of HE explained confirmation was awaited from the OfS as to whether some reallocation of spend from access to success and progression would be allowed this year as a result of the pandemic which help UCS to make adjustments to respond to the success in recruiting.

MARKETING STRATEGY

135. The committee had received the report of the Marketing Manager on the achievement of the Marketing Strategy actions for 2019-20 and the Marketing Strategy for 2020-21.
136. The Marketing Manager explained that the Marketing Strategy set out the core aims, objectives and activities for the year to reach the College's audiences and stakeholders. The strategy was intended to be adaptable, allowing for activities and events to be

- improved or reinvented in response to feedback and to external developments. The Marketing Manager commended her team as a solid and productive unit which had proved itself adaptable and productive.
137. The Marketing Manager highlighted some of the key priorities and activities, including in relation to new online interactive content and promotion of new courses at Andover College, the launch of new facilities at Sparsholt College and the extension of the approach to HE recruitment and conversion to FE.
 138. Asked about any plans in relation to repeating the Year 11s local schools Sparsholt College event which had been held in 2019, the Marketing Manager explained that the pandemic meant the current focus was online events with creative content to counteract 'online fatigue'. Plans were kept under review to respond to future changes in the restrictions caused by the pandemic and it was recognised that the lack of face-to-face visits was a particular risk for recruitment at Sparsholt College given the nature of the curriculum and the value of meeting the teaching teams. The team had sought to mitigate this by filming introductions and Q&As with both academic and support staff.
 139. Members discussed with management the marketing challenges in relation to agriculture and the rapid developments in agricultural technology and environmental and welfare priorities and related strategic investment. The Vice Principal Sparsholt gave the examples of considerations as to possible future investment in robotic dairy equipment, as well as the environmental agenda and research into animal foods to reduce CO² emissions.
 140. The Principal acknowledged the developments in the agriculture sector and the potential impact of future government policy and Brexit on the sector and that these would inform future strategic discussions at the Board.
 141. The committee also reflected on the marketing challenges in relation to realigning historical perceptions about Andover College and continuing to differentiate the college from other local offers. The Vice Principal Andover gave some examples of projects which had been undertaken within local schools, some of which had been impacted by the pandemic.
 142. **Resolved** – that the 2020-21 Marketing Strategy be approved as being in line with the College's strategic objectives, noting that there would inevitably be changes to planned activities necessitated by the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

HEALTHCHECK REPORT

143. The committee noted the most recent Healthcheck report (2020/07), including the latest FE and HE applications data.
144. Responding to the Committee Chair's enquiry about the popular (fully funded) welding courses, the Deputy Principal Corporate explained that the College's trainer had an excellent reputation and there was a shortage of local welding teachers.
145. The meeting ended at 11.30 am.